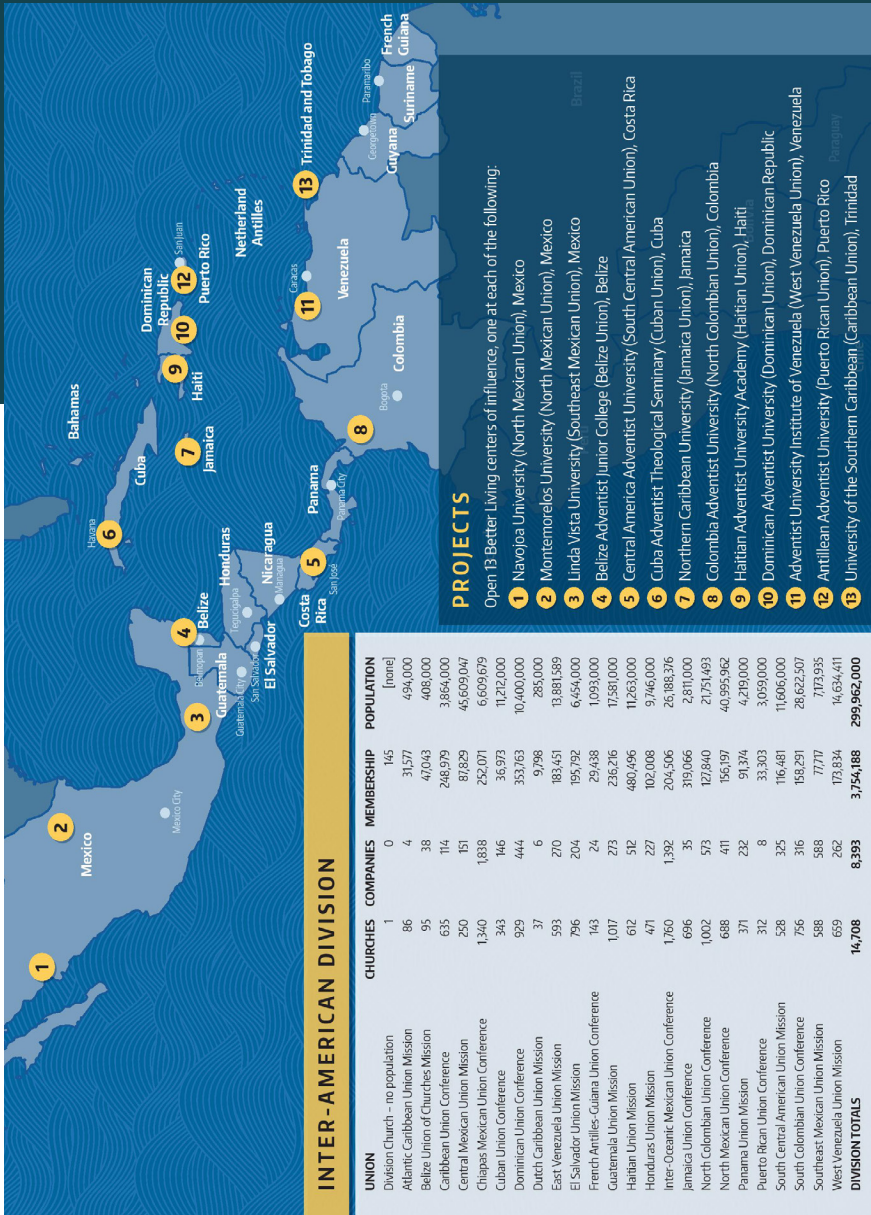


# Inter-American Division



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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL STUDY GUIDE

THE PROMISE: GOD'S EVERLASTING COVENANT

Apr • May • June 2021

Adult  
Sabbath School  
Bible Study Guide  
April | May | June 2021

# THE PROMISE

God's Everlasting Covenant



# Contents

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<b>1</b>	<b>What Happened?</b> — <i>March 27–April 2</i> —	5
<b>2</b>	<b>Covenant Primer</b> — <i>April 3–9</i> —	18
<b>3</b>	<b>“All Future Generations”</b> — <i>April 10–16</i> —	31
<b>4</b>	<b>An Everlasting Covenant</b> — <i>April 17–23</i> —	44
<b>5</b>	<b>Children of the Promise</b> — <i>April 24–30</i> —	57
<b>6</b>	<b>Abraham’s Seed</b> — <i>May 1–7</i> —	72
<b>7</b>	<b>Covenant at Sinai</b> — <i>May 8–14</i> —	85
<b>8</b>	<b>Covenant Law</b> — <i>May 15–21</i> —	98
<b>9</b>	<b>Covenant Sign</b> — <i>May 22–28</i> —	111
<b>10</b>	<b>The New Covenant</b> — <i>May 29–June 4</i> —	124
<b>11</b>	<b>New Covenant Sanctuary</b> — <i>June 5–11</i> —	137
<b>12</b>	<b>Covenant Faith</b> — <i>June 12–18</i> —	150
<b>13</b>	<b>The New Covenant Life</b> — <i>June 19–25</i> —	163

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# The Covenant



**I**n 1588, a young English woman (seven months pregnant) looked out over the sea, and what she saw—the Spanish Armada, with 130 heavily armed ships planning to invade the island—so frightened her that she went into premature labor, the midwife being fear.

Fear, in fact, was an apt image for her child, Thomas Hobbes, who became one of Europe’s greatest political theorists. Living at a time when England had been wracked by civil war and endless religious violence, Hobbes wrote that humankind, without a strong, all-encompassing government, existed in a state of perpetual fear—fear of instability, fear of conquest, and, most of all, fear of death. People lived in what he called “the war of all against all” and that unless something radical was done, human life would be, he warned, nothing but “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

What was the solution? Hobbes said that there was only one: the people must place themselves under a single power that would reduce all their wills to a single will and that would exercise complete authority over them. This power, this sovereign—be it a single man or an assembly of men—though wielding absolute hegemony over the nation, would end the terrible conditions that made their lives so fearful and unstable. In other words, in exchange for all their rights, the people got peace and security instead. This transfer of power, from the people to the sovereign, is what Hobbes called the “covenant.”

The covenant idea, however, did not originate with Hobbes. On the contrary, thousands of years earlier, God made a covenant with Israel, a covenant whose roots, in fact, went back even further in time. Unlike Hobbes’s covenant, which was initiated and promulgated by

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the people, this covenant was initiated and promulgated by the true Sovereign, the Creator of heaven and earth. Also, though Hobbes's covenant was motivated solely by fear, God's covenant is motivated by love, His love for the fallen race, a love that led Him to the Cross.

Thus, because of what Christ has done for us, we love God back, and just as in the Hobbesian covenant, in which the subjects had to surrender to the sovereign, we surrender, too—our sinful ways, our fears, our twisted notions of right and wrong. We do this not to gain something in return, but because we already have been given the best that the Sovereign can give—Jesus Christ and the Redemption found only in Him.

How does it all work? It is as simple as an exchange: Christ takes our sins and gives us His righteousness so that, through Him, we are accounted as righteous as God Himself. In this way, sin is no longer attributed to us; it no longer has to keep us separated from Him. Murderers,

*God's covenant is motivated by love—His love for the fallen race, a love that led Him to the cross.*

adulterers, bigots, liars, thieves, and even the incestuous can all be viewed as righteous as God Himself. And this wonderful gift, this accounting of righteousness, comes to them by faith, and faith alone. Hence the phrase, "righteousness by faith."

But it does not end there, either. Murderers, adulterers, bigots, liars, thieves, and even the incestuous can, through Jesus, enter into a relationship with God, because Jesus' blood brings not only forgiveness but cleansing, healing, and restoration. We are, through Christ, born again, and through this experience God writes His holy law upon the fleshy tables of our hearts. Thus, murderers, adulterers, bigots, liars, thieves, and the incestuous no longer do the things they used to do. From and by this inward law, all of life is shaped for the believer. These people desire to work out what God puts within them, and that desire is matched with the promise of divine power. Here is the essence of what it means to live in covenant relationship with God.

This quarter, then, we look more closely at what God's covenant is, what it offers, even what it demands. Though drawn from many sources, the lessons rely heavily on work of the late Gerhard Hasel, whose insights into the Word (where the covenant promises are revealed) will give encouragement, hope, and understanding in order that we can learn something that, perhaps, Hobbes never did: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18).

*Gerhard F. Hasel (PhD, Vanderbilt University) was John Nevins Andrews professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology at the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University. For 27 years he served as director of the ThD/PhD programs and from 1981 to 1988 as the dean of the seminary.*

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# How to Use This Teachers Edition

**“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”**

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

**Final thought:** What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.

# What Happened?



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ps. 100:3; Acts 17:26; Gen. 2:7, 18–25; Gen. 1:28, 29; Gen. 3:15.*

**Memory Text:** “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. . . .’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (*Genesis 1:26, 27, NRSV*).

**T**he biblical account of the creation of humanity is one filled with hope, happiness, and perfection. Each day of Creation ended with the divine pronouncement that it was “good.” Certainly that didn’t include typhoons, earthquakes, famine, and diseases. What happened?

The sixth day of Creation ended with the divine pronouncement that it was “very good.” That is because that day the Lord created beings in His own image: humans—something He had not done with anything else in the Genesis account. Of course, these beings were perfect in every way; they’d have to be. After all, they were made in the image of God. Thus, of sheer necessity, they did not include murderers, thieves, liars, swindlers, and the vile in their ranks. What happened?

This week’s lesson looks at the creation, at what God had first made, and then at what happened to that perfect creation. Finally, it touches on the quarter’s theme: what God is doing to make things right again.

**The Week at a Glance:** What does the Bible teach about origins? What kind of relationship did God want with humanity? What was the purpose of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What hope was given to Adam and Eve immediately after they fell?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 3.

## Turtles All the Way Down . . .

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (*Gen. 1:1*).

A scientist had just lectured on the orbits of the planets around the sun, and the orbit of the sun around the center of the galaxy, when an elderly woman in black tennis shoes rose and said that the earth was a flat disc sitting on the back of a turtle. The scientist, jesting, asked what the turtle sat on, and she responded that it sat on another turtle. “Ma’am,” the scientist continued joking, “what then does *that* turtle sit on?”

She answered, “Another turtle,” but before he could ask what that turtle sat on, she wagged her finger in his face and snapped, “Save your breath, sonny; it’s turtles all the way down.”

However cute, that story deals with *the* most crucial issue of human existence—the nature of the universe itself. What is this world that we find ourselves in by no choice of our own? Why are we here? How did we get here? And where are we all finally going?

These are the most basic and fundamental questions people could ask, because our understanding of who we are and how we got here will impact our understanding of how we live and how we act while we are here.

**Look up the following texts: Genesis 1:1; Psalm 100:3; Isaiah 40:28; Acts 17:26; Ephesians 3:9; and Hebrews 1:2, 10. How does each one, in its own way, answer some of the above questions? What is the one point that they all have in common?**

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What is interesting about Genesis 1:1 (or even the other texts) is that the Lord does not attempt to prove that He is the Creator. There are no elaborate arguments to make the point. Instead, it is simply and clearly stated, with no attempt to justify, explain, or prove it. Either we accept it on faith, or we do not. In fact, faith is the *only* way that we can accept it, for one simple reason: none of us were here to see the creation process itself. It would, indeed, have been a logical impossibility for us to have been there at our own creation. Even secularists, whatever view of origins they hold, have to take that view on faith for the same reason that we as creationists have to: none of us were there to view the event.

**Nevertheless, even if God has asked us to believe in Him as Creator, He does not ask us to believe without giving us good reasons to believe. Realizing that there is a certain amount of faith required in almost anything we believe, write down reasons why it makes sense to have faith that we are here because a Creator purposely put us here, as opposed to our origins being rooted in nothing but pure chance.**

## In the Image of the Maker *(Gen. 1:27)*

**The Bible states that God created humankind—male and female—“in His own image” (*Gen. 1:27, NKJV*). Use this idea to answer the following questions:**

**1. What does it mean that God created us in His own image? In what ways are we “in His own image” (*NKJV*)?**

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**2. According to the Genesis account, did the Lord make anything else “in His own image” (*NKJV*) other than humankind? If not, what does that tell us about our unique status, in contrast to the rest of the earthly creation? What lessons can we draw from this contrast?**

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**3. What else can be found in the account of the creation of humankind that sets the race apart from anything else the Lord had created? (*See Gen. 2:7, 18–25.*)**

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Although we must speak of God in human terminology, we must not forget that He is a spiritual Being (*John 4:24*), possessing divine characteristics. All we can say is that in our physical, mental, and spiritual natures, we reflect in some way our divine Creator, however much there remains about Him that, at least for us, is still shrouded in mystery. The Bible emphasizes, however, the spiritual and mental aspects of our mind. These aspects we can develop and improve. It is the uniqueness of the human mind that makes possible a nourishing relationship with God, something the rest of God’s earthly creation seems unable to do.

Notice, too, the unique account of how God made woman. Both men and women share the incredible privilege of being made in the image of God. In their creation, there is no hint of inferiority of one to the other. God Himself made them both from the same material. God made both equal from the start and placed them together in a special relationship with Him. Both had the same opportunity to develop their God-given characters in a way that would bring glory to Him.

“God Himself gave Adam a companion. He provided ‘an help meet for him’—a helper corresponding to him—one who was fitted to be his companion, and who could be one with him in love and sympathy. 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.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.



## God and Humankind Together *(Gen. 1:28, 29)*

Notice God's first spoken words to humankind, at least as they appear in Scripture. He points them to their ability to procreate, to reproduce more of their own kind. He also points them to the earth itself, to the creation, and He tells them to replenish it, to subdue it, and to have mastery over it. He also points them to the plants they can eat. In short, according to the Bible, God's first words to man and woman deal specifically with their interaction and relationship with the physical world.

**What** do Genesis 1:28, 29 tell us about how God views the material world? Do they imply that there is something bad in material things and our enjoyment of them? What lessons can we learn from these early scenes in human history about how we should relate to the creation itself?

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Also, with these words, God takes the first steps toward a relationship with humankind. He speaks to them, gives them commands, tells them what to do. There's a responsibility implicit in these words too. God has asked them to be masters over this wonderful creation that He Himself has made.

**Genesis 1:28** says that God blessed Adam and Eve. What does that mean? What kind of relationship does it imply between them and their Creator?

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God addressed Adam and Eve as intelligent beings who could respond to His kindness and enter into communion and fellowship with Him. Also, as creature-children, Adam and Eve were dependent upon the blessing and care of their Creator-Father. He provided all they needed. They did nothing to deserve what He gave them. They were purely recipients of something they did not earn.

**When we read about the creation of man and woman, we can see elements, before sin, of the kind of relationship God wants us to have with Him now, after sin. Review the day's study and see what parallels you can find that help us understand how we can relate to Him, even in our fallen condition.**

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## At the Tree

**“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16, 17).**

This test provided Adam and Eve with an opportunity to exercise their free will. It also challenged them to respond positively or negatively to their relationship with the Creator. It also shows that God had made them free moral beings. After all, if they did not have the opportunity to disobey, why would the Lord have even bothered warning them, in the first place, against disobedience?

“Everything preceding in this chapter has paved the way for this climax [*Gen. 2:16, 17*]. The future of the race centers upon this single prohibition. Man is not to be confused by a multiplicity of issues. Only one divine ordinance must be kept in mind. By thus limiting the number of injunctions to *one*, Yahweh gives tokens of his mercy. Besides, to indicate that this one commandment is not grievous, the Lord sets it against the background of a broad permission: ‘from [every] tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.’ ”—H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1942), vol. 1, p. 127.

By calling Adam and Eve to obey His will, God was saying: I am your Creator, and I have made you in My image. Your life is sustained by Me, for by Me you live and move and have your being. I have provided all things for your well-being and happiness (sustenance, home, human companionship) and have established you as ruler of this world under Me. If you are willing to affirm this relationship with Me because you love Me, then I will be your God, and you will be My children. And you can affirm this relationship and the trust implicit in it by simply obeying this specific command.

In the end, our relationship with God can be effective and lasting only if we freely choose to accept His will. In essence, rejecting His will is to claim independence from Him. It indicates that we believe we do not need Him. That is a choice that results in the knowledge of evil, and evil leads to alienation, loneliness, frustration, and death.

**The test God gave Adam and Eve was one of loyalty and faith. Would they be loyal to their Creator, who had given them everything they needed, plus a world of delights, or would they go their own way, independent of His will? Would they have enough faith in Him to take Him at His word? Their loyalty and faith were tested by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In what ways do we face similar tests every day? How does God’s law function as a parallel to the command given in Genesis 2:16, 17?**

## Breaking the Relationship

**We** tend to believe people we know and instinctively distrust those whom we do not. Eve naturally would have distrusted Satan. Furthermore, any direct attack against God would have made her defensive. What steps, then, did Satan take to bypass Eve's natural defenses? (*Gen. 3:1–6*).

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“Deplorable as was Eve’s transgression and fraught as it was with potential woe for the human family, her choice did not necessarily involve the race in the penalty for her transgression. It was the deliberate choice of Adam, in the full understanding of an express command of God—rather than hers—that made sin and death the inevitable lot of mankind. Eve was deceived; Adam was not.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 231.

As a result of this blatant transgression and disregard of God’s command, the relationship between God and humankind is now broken. It changed from open fellowship with God to fleeing in fear from His presence (*Gen. 3:8–10*). Alienation and separation replace fellowship and communion. Sin appeared, and all its ugly results followed. Unless something was done, humanity was heading for eternal ruin.

**In** the midst of this tragedy, what words of hope and promise did God speak? (*See Gen. 3:15*.)

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God’s surprising word of prophetic hope speaks of a divinely ordained hostility between the serpent and the woman, between her Offspring and his offspring. This climaxes in the victorious appearance of a representative Offspring of the woman’s seed who delivers a deadly blow to the head of Satan, while he would be able only to bruise the Messiah’s heel.

In their utter helplessness, Adam and Eve were to gain hope from this Messianic promise, hope that would transform their existence, because this hope was God-given and God-supported. This promise of the Messiah and of final victory, however vaguely stated at that time, lifted the gloom into which sinning had placed them.

**Read Genesis 3:9, where God says to Adam and Eve, “ ‘Where are you?’ ” (*NKJV*). God, of course, knew where they were. His words, instead of being filled with condemnation, were to draw guilt-ridden humankind back to Him. In short, God’s first words to fallen humanity came with the hope of His grace and mercy. Even now, in what ways do we find God seeking to call us to His mercy and grace?**

**Further Thought:** The Bible overflows with calls to sinners and backsliders. Compare Psalm 95:7, 8; Isaiah 55:1, 2, 6, 7; Luke 15:3–7; and Luke 19:10. What others can you find?

Also read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51; “The Temptation and Fall,” pp. 52–62; and “The Plan of Redemption,” pp. 63–70, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“There was a gospel sermon, I think, in those three divine words as they penetrated the dense parts of the thicket, and reached the tingling ears of the fugitives—‘Where art thou?’ Thy God is not willing to lose thee; He is come forth to seek thee, just as by-and-by He means to come forth in the Person of His Son, not only to seek but to save that which now is lost.”—Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the Bible, The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), vol. 1, p. 11.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Because the kind and caring God is the One who seeks humankind, how can we respond to this expression of love by the Father and Jesus Christ even now? How does the Lord expect us to respond?
- 2 Contrast the biblical picture of humankind as fallen from a lofty place in God’s creation and in need of redemption with the evolutionary theory of development. Which offers more hope, and why?
- 3 How essential are loving relationships to human happiness? Why is a flourishing connection to God necessary to such relationships? Discuss the influence of healthy human relationships on the persons in those relationships (parent-child, friend-friend, husband-wife, employer-employee, etc.).

**Summary:** God created us in His own image so that a loving fellowship could exist between Him and us. Although the entrance of sin shattered the original union, God seeks to restore this relationship through the plan of redemption. Life for us as dependent creatures takes on true meaning and clarity only when we enter into union with our Creator.

## First Deaf Theology Student

By JOSE RODRIGO MARTINEZ PATRON

My Seventh-day Adventist mother noticed that I, as a baby, did not respond to sounds in our home in Merida, Mexico. She would call my name, and I did not notice.

Mother sought help when I was about two. She sent me to a special-needs school that taught me sign language and how to speak. My teacher taught me the sounds of letters and words. I put my hand to her throat when she spoke and then tried to replicate the sound with my own throat.

My mother cried because her son couldn't hear her voice. "Don't worry," the teacher said. "Have patience. Everything will work out fine."

I attended the special-needs school for two hours every day. I also studied at an Adventist school for two hours daily. The church school taught me how to read and write, and, most important, it taught me about God.

I attended the Adventist school up to the age of eight. But the school didn't have teachers who knew sign language, so Mother ended up sending me to a public school with teachers who could communicate with me.

The first time that I met other Adventist young people with hearing impairments was at a church-organized conference at Linda Vista Adventist University. It was wonderful to mingle with other Adventist young people with the same needs as mine. I was invited to attend the annual conference again in two years. Then the Inter-American Division organized its first special-needs conference and held the event at Montemorelos University in Monterrey, Mexico. At the conference, a desire grew in me to serve God as a pastor. But how? I could never afford the tuition.

As the conference concluded, university president Ismael Castillo made a surprising announcement. "Do any of you want to study here?" he asked.

He offered a full scholarship for the tuition. I understood then that God was calling me to be a pastor, and I stood up.

I am the first deaf theology student at Montemorelos University. This is my second year at the university. It is difficult because no one knows sign language. I concentrate hard and try to read the teachers' lips. I failed several classes my first year, and I have to retake those classes.

I have led several evangelistic meetings for the hearing-impaired, including in Mexico City. Churches with deaf people invite me to preach.

I have a huge desire in my heart to graduate and serve as a pastor. I dream about going to the mission field, perhaps to Spain as a missionary to the hearing-impaired.

Please pray for the hearing-impaired. We all have dreams. We are willing to do big things for the Lord.




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*This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a missionary training center at Montemorelos University.*



**Study Focus:** *Genesis 1:26, 27****Part I: Overview***

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God created humankind in His image in order that a deep relationship might exist between Him and us. Adam's and Eve's disregard for God's will broke that relationship. However, God had a back-up plan: the restoration of the broken relationship through Jesus, His Son.

***Part II: Commentary***

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Irreverent curiosity is a diabolical faith trap in which one seeks to penetrate truths that God never intends to be investigated (*see Deut. 29:29*). “But when God said to His Son, ‘Let us make man in our image,’ Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man, and because he was not, he was filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 145.

**Turtles All the Way Down**

In Genesis 1:1, the special Hebrew verb *bara* (create) expresses the Godhead's divine ability to convert divine energy into matter. Some believe that the verb *bara* expresses the divine release of creative energies, which produced something out of nothing. *Bara* had been accomplished in “absolute origination, that is, . . . a beginning and bringing out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and not any mere fashioning of some preexistent matter or pre-matter.”—Harold Kuhn, “God Makes,” in *The Living God: Readings in Christian Theology*, ed. Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 481.

Perennial faith thrives in the midnight of our unknown about God, glittering like a storm-beaten lighthouse, which stands strong, despite waves of unbelief. It is faith such as this that survives the foggy haze of unscriptural belief systems in regard to humankind's origin.

“Spiritualism teaches ‘that man is the creature of progression.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 554. “Social Darwinism . . . lays the groundwork for geneticists and biologists, under the cloak of science, to categorize human beings in a way as to support racial superiority, an idea brought to its apogee in Nazi Germany.”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1999), pp. 66, 67.

**In the Image of the Maker**

From the following resource, it has been suggested that “*tselem*

(image) denotes the shadow outline of a figure, and *damuth* (likeness) the correspondence or resemblance of that shadow to the figure.”—H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell, ed., *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis–Exodus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1961), p. 30.

“Like God, they had the power of choice—the freedom to think and act according to moral imperatives. Thus they were free to love and obey or to distrust and disobey.”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2018), p. 98.

### God and Humankind Together

In the biblical sense, when “God blesses,” God empowers the function or fulfillment of the thing blessed. “God created man for His own glory, that after test and trial the *human family might become one with the heavenly family*. It was God’s purpose to re-populate heaven with the human family, if they would show themselves obedient to His every word.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1082; emphasis supplied. (See also *Isa. 43:7*.)

### At the Tree

“His followers were seeking him; and he [Satan] aroused himself and, assuming a look of defiance, informed them of his plans to wrest from God . . . Adam and his companion Eve. . . . And if they could gain access to the tree of life in the midst of the garden, their strength would, they thought, be equal to that of the holy angels, and even God himself could not expel them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 30, 31.

In simple terms, God warned the innocent pair to avoid a special tree held in divine reserve. “The Lord has given me a view of other worlds. Wings were given me, and an angel attended me from the city to a place that was bright. . . . The grass of the place was living green, and the birds there warbled a sweet song. The inhabitants . . . were of all sizes; they were noble, majestic, and lovely. . . . Then I saw two trees, one looked much like the tree of life in the city. The fruit of both looked beautiful, but of one they could not eat. They had power to eat of both, but were forbidden to eat of one. Then my attending angel said to me, ‘None in this place have tasted of the forbidden tree.’ ” —Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 39, 40. (See also *Gen. 2:15–17*.)

### Breaking the Relationship

The theology of human rebellion is tied to Adam’s unholy reasoning, which imbibed the forbidden fruit of *relativism*.

Relativism, a new paradigm of evil in which self retains the tendency to decide its own parameters of morality, competes with God’s sovereign will, and it is wholly unconquerable except through divine intervention. (See *Judg. 21:25*.)

The results were tragic.

“They both ate, and . . . they obtained . . . the knowledge of sin, and a sense of guilt. The *covering of light* about them soon disappeared, and under a sense of guilt, and loss of their *divine covering*, a shivering seized them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 40, emphasis supplied.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Reflection:** We live with the effects of sin in every aspect of our lives. There is a theological doctrine called “total depravity.” Though it does not mean what the phrase commonly means today, it’s not a whole lot better. It deals with the idea that every aspect of human existence has been damaged by sin. That, unfortunately, seems to be the case.

- 1. How do we see the reality of this “total depravity” manifested in our own lives? What, if anything, can we do about it? Or, if we can’t do anything about it, in that it is our nature, how do we overcome that nature? And to what degree can we?**

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- 2. The Fall seriously hampers us from having a complete relationship with God. Jesus died so that our relationship with God might be restored. How does the power of the Cross enable us to regain that relationship?**

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- 3. Our Creator took extra time and care to create Adam and Eve. Why do you think He made their creation an event that would be talked about, marveled at, and debated throughout eternity?**

**Compare God’s creation of humanity with the preparations that expectant parents make for their firstborn. How do these similarities help you to understand God’s love?**

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- 4. How does access to God’s power assist us in our spiritual growth and in our understanding of God’s plan for us?**

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- 5. Because He is all-knowing, God was well aware of the “risk” in creating humanity in His own image. Imagine His heavy heart when He had to resort to “Plan B—Death of His Only Son.” What does Plan B mean to you when you step out of the boundaries of your relationship with God? How are your diversions and temptations similar to those that Adam and Eve faced?**

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- 6. When Jesus lived on earth, His touch healed many who believed. His touch was a glimpse of His creative power. Before He left, He promised that we would continue to have access to His creative power (*see John 14:12–14*). Is this promise figurative or literal? Explain. How can this promise make a difference in your everyday life?**

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7. Genesis indicates that humankind originally was created in the image of God. Does this apply only to the state of existence before the Fall, or is it still, in some sense, true now? If so, how so?

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8. God told Adam and Eve to master and subdue the earth and the forces of nature. How should we interpret this command in light of the often-irresponsible exploitation of nature for which humankind has at times been responsible?

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9. Adam and Eve fell as a result of the exercise of their free will. This free will, while intended by God as a gift, was turned into a curse. Can you think of examples of other things that are good in themselves but can become perverted as a result of poor choices?

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10. Adam, instead of following God, followed Eve. What does this say to us about the danger of allowing other people or things to distract us from our commitment to God?

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# Covenant Primer



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 9:15; Isa. 54:9; Gen. 12:1–3; Gal. 3:6–9, 29; Exod. 6:1–8; Jer. 31:33, 34.*

**Memory Text:** “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine” (*Exodus 19:5*).

Last week left off with the fall of humanity because of our first parents' sin. This week is a quick summary of the whole quarter, as we take one day each to look at the early covenants, the ones that in their own way were all present-truth manifestations of the true covenant, the one ratified at Calvary by the blood of Jesus, the one that we, as Christians, enter into with our Lord.

We begin with the covenant God made with Noah to spare him and his family from destruction. We proceed to the covenant with Abraham, so rich and full of promise for all of us; then to the covenant at Sinai and the importance of what was proclaimed there; and finally we look at the new covenant, the one that all the others pointed toward. All of these, of course, will be studied in more depth over the next several weeks. This week is just a preview.

**The Week at a Glance:** What does the word *covenant* mean? What elements make up the covenant? What was the covenant that God made with Noah? What hope was found in the covenant with Abraham? What role do faith and works play in the human end of the covenant? Is the covenant just a deal, or does it have relational aspects to it? What is the essence of the “new covenant”?

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 10.

## Covenant Basics

**“And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly” (Gen. 17:2).**

“The Hebrew word translated as ‘covenant’ (appearing about 287 times in the Old Testament) is *berith*. It can also be translated as ‘testament’ or ‘last will.’ Its origin is unclear, but it has come to mean ‘that which bound two parties together.’ It was used, however, for many different types of ‘bond,’ both between man and man and between man and God. It has a common use where both parties were men, and a distinctively religious use where the covenant was between God and man. The religious use was really a metaphor based on the common use but with a deeper connotation [meaning].”—J. Arthur Thompson, “Covenant (OT),” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), vol. 1, p. 790.

Like the marriage covenant, the biblical covenant defines both a *relationship* and an *arrangement*. As an arrangement, the biblical covenant contains these basic elements:

1. God affirmed the covenant *promises* with an oath (*Gal. 3:16; Heb. 6:13, 17*).
2. The covenant *obligation* was obedience to God’s will as expressed in the Ten Commandments (*Deut. 4:13*).
3. The *means* by which God’s covenant obligation is ultimately fulfilled is through Christ and the plan of salvation (*Isa. 42:1, 6*).

**Look** at the three elements listed above (God’s promises, our obedience, and the plan of salvation). How can you see those factors at work in your own walk with the Lord? Write down a paragraph describing how they are manifest in your life now.

In the Old Testament, the sacrificial system of types instructed the people regarding the entire plan of salvation. Through its symbols, the patriarchs and Israel learned to exercise faith in the coming Redeemer. Through its rites, the penitent could find forgiveness for sin and release from guilt. The blessings of the covenant could thus be retained, and spiritual growth—restoring the image of God in the life—could thereby continue, even when humankind failed to uphold their end of the bargain.

**Though there are covenants made between people, the main use of the word *berith* in the Hebrew Bible deals with the relationship between God and humanity. Considering who God is and who we are in comparison to Him, what kind of relationship would such a covenant depict?**

## Covenant With Noah

**“But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons’ wives with thee” (Gen. 6:18).**

In the above verse the word *covenant* appears for the first time in the Bible, and, in this context, God has just told Noah about His decision to destroy the earth because of the massive and continuing spread of sin. Though this destruction will come in a worldwide flood, God is not forsaking the world He created. He continues to offer the covenant relationship first set in operation after the Fall. The divine “I” who offers the covenant is Himself the ground of Noah’s security. As the covenant-keeping God, the Lord promised to protect the family members who were willing to live in a committed relationship with Him, one that resulted in obedience.

**Was the covenant with Noah just one-sided? Remember that the idea of a covenant implies more than one party. Did Noah have his end of the deal to uphold? What lesson is there for us in the answer to these questions?**

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God tells Noah that there is going to be a flood and the world will be destroyed. But God makes a deal with him in which He promises to save Noah and his family. Thus, the stakes were quite high, because if God did not uphold His end of the promise, then no matter what Noah did, he would be wiped out with the rest of the world.

God said He would make a “covenant” with Noah. The word itself implies an intention to honor what one says one will do. It is not just some whimsical statement. The word itself comes loaded with commitment. Suppose the Lord had said to Noah, “Look, the world is going to end in a terrible deluge, and I might save you, or I might not. In the meantime, do this and this and this, and then we’ll see what happens, but I’m not making any guarantees.” Such statements hardly come with the kind of assurance and promise found in the word *covenant* itself.

**Some people have argued that Noah’s flood was not worldwide but merely a local deluge. If so, then in the context of what God promises in Genesis 9:15 (see also Isa. 54:9), every time another local flood happens (and they seem to happen all the time), God’s covenant promise is broken. In contrast, the fact that there has not been another worldwide flood proves the validity of God’s covenant promise. In short, what does this tell us about how we can trust His promises?**

## The Covenant With Abram

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (*Gen. 12:3*).

**Read** Genesis 12:1–3. List the specific promises God made to Abram.

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**Notice** that among these promises God says to Abram that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (*Gen. 12:3*). What does that mean? How were all the families of the earth blessed in Abram? See Galatians 3:6–9. In what ways can you see in this earlier promise the promise of Jesus the Messiah? (*See Gal. 3:29*.)

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In this, the first recorded divine revelation to Abram, God promised to enter into a close and lasting relationship with him, even before He used any language that spoke about covenant making. Direct references to the covenant that God would make came later (*Gen. 15:4–21, Gen. 17:1–14*). For the moment, God offered a divine-human relationship of great significance. The repeated “I will” in Genesis 12:1–3 suggests the depth and greatness of God’s offer and promise.

In addition, Abram received a single, but testing, command: “Go forth.” He obeyed by faith (*Heb. 11:8*), but not in order to bring about the promised blessings. His obedience was the response of his faith to the loving relationship, which God already had established. In other words, Abram already believed in God, already trusted in God, already had faith in God’s promises. He had to; otherwise, he never would have left his family and ancestral land to begin with and headed into places unknown. His obedience revealed his faith both to men and to angels.

Abram, even back then, revealed the key relationship between faith and works. We are saved by faith—a faith that results in works of obedience. The promise of salvation comes first; the works follow. Although there can be no covenant fellowship and no blessing without obedience, that obedience is faith’s response to what God already has done. Such faith illustrates the principle in 1 John 4:19, “We love him [God], because he first loved us.”

**Read Genesis 15:6. In many ways, how does it show the basis of all covenant promises? Why is this blessing the most precious one of all?**

## The Covenant With Moses

**Read** Exodus 6:1–8 and then answer these questions:

1. What covenant was God talking about? (See Gen. 12:1–3.)

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2. How was the Exodus to be a fulfillment, on His part, of the covenant promises?

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3. What parallel can you find between what God promised the people here and what He promised Noah before the Flood?

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After the Exodus, the children of Israel received the covenant at Sinai, given in the context of redemption from bondage (*Exod. 20:2*) and containing God's sacrificial provisions for atonement and the forgiveness of sin. It was, therefore, like all of the covenants, a covenant of grace, God's grace extended to His people.

In many ways, this covenant reiterated the major emphases in the covenant with Abraham:

1. It was a special relationship of God to His people (*compare Gen. 17:7, 8 with Exod. 19:5, 6*).

2. They would be a great nation (*compare Gen. 12:2 with Exod. 19:6*).

3. Obedience was required (*compare Gen. 17:9–14 and Gen. 22:16–18 with Exod. 19:5*).

“Note the order here: the Lord first *saves* Israel, then gives them His law to *keep*. The same order is true under the gospel. Christ first saves us from sin (*see John 1:29; 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4*), then lives out His law within us (*Gal. 2:20; Rom. 4:25; 8:1–3; 1 Peter 2:24*).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 602.

**Read Exodus 6:7. What is the one thing that comes through in the first part, where the Lord says they will be His people and He their God? Notice the dynamics there. They will be something to God, and God will be something to them. Not only does God want to relate to them in a special way but He also wants them to relate to Him in a special way, as well. Does the Lord not seek the same kind of relationship with us today? Does that first part of Exodus 6:7 reflect your relationship with the Lord, or are you just someone whose name is on the church books? If your answer to the first part of the question is yes, give reasons why.**

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## The New Covenant *(Jer. 31:31–33)*

These passages are the first time the Old Testament mentions what is referred to as the “new covenant.” It is lodged in the context of Israel’s return from exile, and it talks about the blessings they will receive from God.

Again, as in all the other instances, it is God who initiates the covenant, and it is God who will fulfill it by His grace.

Notice, also, the language there. God referred to Himself as a husband to them; He talked about writing His law within their hearts; and, using language from the Abrahamic covenant, He says He will be their God, and they will be His people. Thus, as before, the covenant is not just some legal binding agreement, as in courts of law today. It deals with something more.

**Read** Jeremiah 31:33. Compare it with Exodus 6:7, which details part of the covenant made with Israel. Again, what’s the key element that comes through here? What does God want with His people?

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**Read** Jeremiah 31:34. Compare what is being said there to John 17:3. What is the key thing that the Lord does that builds the foundation for this relationship?

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In Jeremiah 31:31–34, one can see the elements of both grace and obedience, just as in the earlier covenants. God will forgive their sins, God will enter into a relationship with them, and God will bestow His grace in their lives. As a result, the people simply obey Him, not in some rote, mechanical way, but purely because they know Him, because they love Him, and because they want to serve Him. This captures the essence of the covenant relationship the Lord seeks with His people.

**How do you understand this idea of the law as being written in our hearts? Does it imply that the law becomes subjective and personal, something to be interpreted and applied according to the individual configurations of our hearts? Or does it mean something else? If so, what?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “Abraham in Canaan,” pp. 132–138, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Prophets of God Helping Them,” pp. 569–571, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“The yoke that binds to service is the law of God. The great law of love revealed in Eden, proclaimed upon Sinai, and in the new covenant written in the heart, is that which binds the human worker to the will of God. If we were left to follow our own inclinations, to go just where our will would lead us, we should fall into Satan’s ranks and become possessors of his attributes. Therefore God confines us to His will, which is high, and noble, and elevating. He desires that we shall patiently and wisely take up the duties of service. The yoke of service Christ Himself has borne in humanity. He said, ‘I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart.’ Ps. 40:8. ‘I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.’ John 6:38. Love for God, zeal for His glory, and love for fallen humanity, brought Jesus to earth to suffer and to die. This was the controlling power of His life. This principle He bids us adopt.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 329, 330.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Was God’s covenant with Noah, Abram, Moses, and us a continuation of His covenant with Adam, or was it something new? (Compare Gen. 3:15; Gen. 22:18; and Gal. 3:8, 16.)
- 2 Why is the personal, relational aspect of the covenant so important? In other words, you can have a legally binding deal, a “covenant,” with someone, without any close, personal interaction. That kind of arrangement is not, however, what the Lord is seeking in His covenant relationship with His people. Why is that so? Discuss.
- 3 In what ways is marriage a good analogy for the covenant? In what ways does the analogy of marriage fall short in describing the covenant?

**Summary:** The entrance of sin ruptured the relationship the Creator had originally established with the human family through our first parents. Now God seeks to reestablish that same loving relationship by means of a covenant. This covenant signifies both a committed relationship between God and us (like a marriage bond) and an arrangement for saving us and bringing us into harmony with its Maker. God Himself, motivated by His great love for us, is the Initiator of the covenant relationship. By gracious promises and gracious acts, He woos us to come into union with Him.

## Farmer Plants Churches

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

A Seventh-day Adventist minister asked Huang Wen-Ming, a farmer with no theological training, to help plant a church in a small village located a two-and-a-half-hour drive from his home in southern Taiwan.

Wen-Ming was surprised. He wasn't a church member, but he worshiped every Sabbath in his own village. He agreed to help. He spoke with a church member who had a female relative in the other village, Ba-Eao, where no Adventists lived. She gave permission to start a house church in her home.

Wen-Ming and the pastor took turns preaching in the house church every Sabbath, and six people were baptized in six months. About a half year after that, Wen-Ming himself was baptized.

Adventist leaders were impressed that God had blessed Wen-Ming's efforts in southern Taiwan, a region where the church has struggled to make inroads. The Taiwan Conference asked him to plant a church in another southern village, Santi. Six years later, that church was prospering, and Wen-Ming was asked to reopen a church in Siateya. For the first time, Wen-Ming was worried. He thought about his lack of theological training and prayed.

Two people showed up on the first Sabbath that Wen-Ming reopened the church's doors. He encouraged the two worshipers to open their own homes to neighbors for Friday-evening programs and to invite them to attend church services the next day. After eight years, the church had 74 members.

After 17 years of planting churches, Wen-Ming said the secret is to follow Christ's method alone, which Ellen White described this way: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Wen-Ming, 75, said he tries to meet people's needs. At Siateya, he brought mangos, watermelons, and guavas from his farm for a fellowship meal every Sabbath. After three years, worshipers began to follow his example.

The young pastor who replaced Wen-Ming as leader at Siateya asked with astonishment, "How did you grow this church? How can I grow a church like you did?"

"Show mercy, be patient, be humble, and love others," Wen-Ming said. "Just be like Jesus."



*Part of a 2018 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped open six health-focused "urban centers of influence" in Adventist churches in Taiwan. Thank you for your mission offerings that help spread the gospel.*

**Study Focus:** *Exodus 19:5****Part I: Overview***

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God originally established a loving relationship with humanity's parents, Adam and Eve. God now seeks to reestablish that loving relationship with us by means of a new covenant: a covenant that signifies a committed relationship between God and humankind that is centered on the plan of salvation.

***Part II: Commentary***

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The true meaning of grace is brought out in the concept of the covenant. The term *covenant*, from the Hebrew word *berith*, also emphasizes God's free initiative in saving humankind. A covenant, therefore, is a divine constitutional agreement, given to humans, in order that they might serve only Yahweh. By the covenant of grace, Christ offers Himself in a special relationship with humankind. He promises to be our covenant God and our redemptive Emancipator (*see Matt. 1:21*).

**Covenant Basics**

Scripture depicts three distinctive meanings to *grace*. Grace means loving acts of God toward undeserving sinners; grace points to the wonderful character of God; and grace points to God giving us the strength to overcome. In the New Testament, the equivalent of the Hebrew term *grace (chen)* is the Greek idiom (*diatheke*), which refers to a *will*, or *gift*. In common with the covenant, *the will* (a legal document) is a free gift to a party that has no legal claim to it. Thus, *a will* also is a fitting model of God's grace.

**Covenant With Noah**

The concept of covenant appears in Genesis 6:18. " 'But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you' " (*NKJV*). Here, right from the start, we can see the idea of a covenant relationship between humanity, in this case, Noah and God.

"The speaker is God, and Noah is the one addressed. . . .

"So God, in fulfilling His divine purpose, made a covenant as an expression of His relationship with Noah. . . .

"The divine, redemptive . . . covenant relationship that had been in operation since the Fall (*Genesis 3:15*) is . . . renewed by God's taking the initiative."—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2002), pp. 18, 19. "And Noah found grace in the eyes

of Jehovah.”—Jay P. Green, Sr., gen. ed. and trans., *The Interlinear Hebrew/Greek English Bible* (LaFayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1979), vol. 1, p. 14. (*See Gen. 6:8.*)

### The Covenant With Abram

For Abram, a promise of protection and reward increase was embedded in the workings of this covenant. “God spread His covenant-making with Abraham over various periods of time. In Genesis 12:1–3 (*RSV*) we find a fivefold ‘I will’ on the part of God, revealing the intensity and greatness of God’s commitment to Abraham.”—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant*, p. 19.

Christ presented Himself to Abraham, not as *God*, a class, or status, name, but as *Yahweh*, His personal name. He identified Himself as *Yahweh*, “I AM,” a name that expressed His very essence as a God who is self-existent, who has a will, who has a purpose. *Yahweh* is the *covenant* name of the sovereign Jehovah, the name He assumes when He reveals Himself in the most personal way. We see here, too, that the covenant is one of grace: “The Abrahamic covenant is the covenant of grace.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1092.

### The Covenant With Moses

“And God spoke to Moses and said to him, I (am) Jehovah; and I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, and (by) My name Jehovah I never made Myself known to them. And I also established My covenant with them, to give to them the land of Canaan, the land of their travels, (in) which they traveled. And I also have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, whom the Egyptians are enslaving; and I have remembered My covenant.”—*The Interlinear Hebrew/Greek English Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 153. (*See Exod. 6:1–5.*)

A broad-based biblical unfurling of God’s unknown name is relevant in this discussion with Moses: “Yahweh [is] the proper name of the God of Israel. . . . Many recent scholars explain [Yahweh] as . . . (*the one bringing into being, life giver*) . . . (*giver of existence, creator,*) . . . (*he who brings to pass, . . . performer of his promises*) . . . (*the one who is . . . the absolute and unchangeable one,*) . . . (*the existing, ever-living, as self-consistent and unchangeable,*) . . . (*the one ever coming into manifestation as the God of redemption,*) . . . *he will be it, . . . (he will approve himself [give evidence of being, assert his being]).*”—Francis Brown, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), pp. 217, 218.

*Yahweh* is “the name of the God who revealed Himself to Moses at Horeb, and is explained [as] . . . *I shall be the one who will be it . . . He who will be it . . . I am he who I am, i.e. it is no concern of yours . . . I am (this is my name), inasmuch as I am . . . I am who I am,*

*he who is essentially unnameable, inexplicable.*”—Francis Brown, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon*, p. 218.

“‘Jesus said to her, **I AM**’ (John 4:26); . . . ‘But He said to them **I AM!** Do not fear’ (John 6:20); . . . ‘For if you do not believe that **I AM**, you will die in your sins’ (John 8:24); . . . ‘Then Jesus said to them . . . you will know that **I AM**’ (John 8:28); . . . ‘Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, . . . Before Abraham came into being, **I AM**’ (vs. 58); . . . ‘From this time I tell you, before it happens . . . **I AM**’ (John 13:19); . . . ‘Jesus said to them, **I AM!**’ (John 18:5). . . . ‘Jesus answered, I told you that **I AM**. Then if you seek Me, allow these to depart—that the word might be fulfilled’ (vs. 8).”—*The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*, vol. 4, pp. 258–307.

The covenant that God desired for Israel was for them to know that divine love had no cloaked motive, and all that God sought from His people was a genuine love response, a response that would, indeed, be made manifest by their works.

### The New Covenant

“In Jeremiah 31:31–34 we find the Bible’s most profound and exciting promise of the new covenant. . . .

“Few people realize that the New Testament received its name from this particular passage. Since the Latin word for covenant is testament, Origen, the famous church father (ca. A.D. 185–254) called the twenty-seven books of the Bible . . . the New Testament.”—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant*, pp. 21, 22.

## *Part III: Life Application*

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**For Reflection:** Before World War II, a woman was traveling through Georgia on her way to Moscow. She happened to meet an elderly woman living in a cottage. When the old woman learned that the traveler was headed for Moscow, she inquired, “Would you deliver a box of homemade toffee to my son?” Her son was Joseph Stalin. To the rest of the world, however, he was the dictator of Russia. But what others thought of him made no difference to his mother.

- 1. God’s love is like that of Stalin’s mother. It does not matter how bad we look in the eyes of others; God will continue to love us. Consider how this kind of love directs Him to offer us a covenant relationship.**

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2. What role does our faith play when we understand that God takes the first step toward reconciliation? When we exercise our faith, how does God's first step affect our everyday deeds and actions? Give an example of the dangers we face if we put works before faith.
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3. A covenant is a relationship entered into between two people, a bargain for mutual profit, an engagement for mutual friendship. In the Bible, we repeatedly see God taking the first step to initiate a covenant relationship. If it is mutually beneficial to both parties, why is it that we wait for God to come to us? What does God's persistence in pursuing lost humanity say to the universe?
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4. The lesson compares our covenant relationship with God to marriage. A good marriage lasts not because of obligation but because of love. Based on this comparison, describe the "ideal" covenant relationship between God and you.
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5. In a marriage, love increases in proportion to the amount of quality time put into the relationship. Think of ways in which you can improve the quality of time you spend with God in prayer and meditation. Consider having a "spiritual-growth partner" who will encourage you and remind you to periodically reassess the time you spend with God.
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6. The Bible speaks of several covenants, concluding with the new covenant. Are they in reality distinct from one another, or are they really the same covenant expressed in different ways? Is it possible for God to make more than one covenant?

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7. Why do you think it was necessary for God to reiterate His covenants with His people? Did His people forget, or might there have been points that God needed to stress more strongly at one time or another?

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8. By definition, a covenant is an agreement between or among two or more parties. Usually, these are parties who exist at some level of equality with one another. The relationship between Creator and creation would not typically be considered an example of this; yet, God feels the need to enter into an agreement with His creation. Why?

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9. What does the statement that God's law will be written in our hearts mean? (*See Rom. 2:15.*)
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# “All Future Generations”



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Gen. 3:6; Gen. 6:5, 11; Gen. 6:18; Gen. 9:12–17; Isa. 4:3; Rev. 12:17.*

**Memory Text:** “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (*Genesis 6:8*).

**B**acteria are plant organisms too small to see without a microscope. Even after being magnified 1,000 times, a single, common round bacterium appears no larger than a pencil point. Given favorable conditions for growth—sufficient warmth, moisture, and food—bacteria multiply at an extremely rapid rate. For example, some bacteria reproduce by simple fission: a mature cell simply splits into two daughter cells. When fission takes place every hour, one bacterium can produce more than 16 million new bacteria in 24 hours. At the end of 48 hours, hundreds of billions of bacteria will have appeared.

This microscopic phenomenon in the natural world illustrates the rapid growth of evil after the Fall. Gifted with giant intellects, robust health, and longevity, this virile race forsook God and prostituted their rare powers to the pursuit of iniquity in all forms. While bacteria may be exterminated by sunlight, chemicals, or high temperatures, God chose to check this rampant rebellion by a universal flood.

**The Week at a Glance:** What did sin do to God’s creation? What were some of the characteristics of Noah? What elements were involved in the covenant with Noah? In what ways is God’s grace revealed in the covenant with Noah before the Flood? What does the covenant God made with humanity after the Flood teach us about His universal love for us?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 17.

## The Sin Principle *(Gen. 6:5)*

The divine opinion at the end of God’s creation was that all “was very good” (*Gen. 1:31*). Then sin entered, and the paradigm shifted. Things weren’t “very good” anymore. God’s orderly creation was marred by sin and all its loathsome results. Rebellion had reached terrible proportions by Noah’s day; evil consumed the race. Though the Bible does not give us many details (see Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 90–92, for more), the transgressions and rebellion were clearly something that even a loving, patient, and forgiving God couldn’t tolerate.

How could things get so bad so quickly? The answer is, perhaps, not that hard to find. How many people today, looking at their own sins, have not asked the same thing: How did things get so bad so quickly?

**Look** up the texts listed below. Write down the points they make. Notice the steady progression of sin:

*Gen. 3:6* \_\_\_\_\_

*Gen. 3:11–13* \_\_\_\_\_

*Gen. 4:5* \_\_\_\_\_

*Gen. 4:8* \_\_\_\_\_

*Gen. 4:19* \_\_\_\_\_

*Gen. 4:23* \_\_\_\_\_

*Gen. 6:2* \_\_\_\_\_

*Gen. 6:5, 11* \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 6:5 and 11 did not arise in a vacuum. There was a history before them. This terrible result had a cause. Sin progressively got worse. It tends to do that. Sin is not like a cut or a wound, with some automatic, built-in process that brings healing. On the contrary, if left unchecked, sin multiplies, never satisfied until it leads to ruin and death. One does not have to imagine life before the Flood to see this principle operating. It exists all around us, even now.

No wonder God hates sin; no wonder, sooner or later, sin will be eradicated. A just, loving God could do nothing else with it.

The good news, of course, is that though He wants to get rid of sin, He wants to save sinners. That’s what the covenant is all about.

## The Man Noah *(Gen. 6:9)*

**Amid** all the texts about the evil of the antediluvian (pre-Flood) world, the man Noah stands out in contrast to those around him. Look at the above text and the three particular points that the Bible makes about Noah. To the best of your ability, write down what you think each of these points means:

1. He was “a righteous man” (NRSV). \_\_\_\_\_

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2. He was “blameless” (NRSV). \_\_\_\_\_

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3. He “walked with God.” \_\_\_\_\_

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There is no question, Noah was someone who had a saving relationship with the Lord. He was someone whom God could work with, someone who would listen to Him, obey Him, and trust in Him. That is why the Lord was able to use Noah to fulfill His purposes and why Peter, in the New Testament, called him “a preacher of righteousness” (*2 Pet. 2:5*).

**Read** Genesis 6:8. How does this text help us understand the relationship between Noah and the Lord?

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The word *grace* occurs here for the first time in Scripture and clearly has the same meaning as in the New Testament references, where the merciful, unmerited favor of God, exercised toward undeserving sinners, is described. Thus, we need to understand that however “blameless” and “righteous” Noah was, he was still a sinner who needed the unmerited favor of his God. In that sense, Noah is no different from any of us who seek earnestly to follow the Lord.

**Understanding that Noah needed God’s grace, as do the rest of us, look at your own life and ask yourself this question: Could it be said of me that I am, like Noah, “righteous,” “blameless,” and that I “walk with God”? Write down your reasons for whatever position you take, and (if you feel comfortable) share it with the class on Sabbath.**

## Covenant With Noah

“**But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you’**” (*Gen. 6:18, RSV*).

In this one verse we have the basics of the biblical covenant that God makes with humanity: God and humankind enter into an agreement. Very simple.

Yet, there are more elements than first meet the eye.

To begin, there is the element of obedience on humanity’s part. God says to Noah that he and his family shall go into the ark. They have their part to do, and if they do not do it, the covenant is broken. If the covenant is broken, they are the ultimate losers, for in the end they are the beneficiaries of the covenant. After all, if Noah said no to God and did not want to abide by the covenant or said yes but then changed his mind, what would have been the results for him and his family?

**God** says that it is “my covenant.” What does that tell us about the basic nature of the covenant? What difference would there be in our concept of the covenant if the Lord had called it “our covenant”?

However unique this particular situation, we see here the basic God-human dynamic found in the covenant. By establishing “my covenant” with Noah, God here again displays His grace. He shows that He is willing to take the initiative in order to save human beings from the results of their sins. In short, this covenant must not be seen as some sort of union of equals in which each “partner” in the covenant is dependent upon the other. We could say that God “benefits” from the covenant, but only in a radically different sense from the way humans do. He benefits in that those whom He loves will be given eternal life—no small satisfaction for the Lord (*Isa. 53:11*). But that is not to say that He benefits in the same way we, on the receiving end of the same covenant, benefit.

Try this analogy: a man has fallen overboard from a boat in the midst of a storm. Someone on the deck says that he will throw a life preserver over to haul him in. The one in the water, however, has to agree to his end of the “deal,” and that is to grab on and to hold on to what has been provided him. That, in many ways, is what the covenant between God and humanity is all about.

**How does the analogy above help you to understand the concept of grace that exists in the covenant? How does it help you understand what your relationship to God even now needs to be based on?**

## Sign of the Rainbow

**“And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth’ ” (Gen. 9:12, 13, RSV).**

Few natural phenomena are more beautiful than the rainbow. Who does not remember as a child one’s first fascination and wonder as those amazing bars of light bent across the sky like some sort of beckoning, mystical portal into the heavens? Even as adults, our breath can be taken away by the sight of those outrageous colors in the clouds. No wonder that even today the rainbow is used as a symbol for so many things: from political organizations to cults to rock bands to travel agencies (look up the word *rainbow* on the internet and see). Obviously, those beautiful bands of color still touch chords in our hearts and minds.

Of course, that was God’s whole point.

**What** did the Lord say the rainbow would symbolize? (See Gen. 9:12–17.)

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The Lord said He would use the rainbow as a sign of “my covenant” (Gen. 9:15). How interesting that He would use the word “covenant” here, for, in this case, the covenant differs from how it is used elsewhere. In contrast to the covenant with Abraham or the Sinai covenant, there is no specific obligation expressed on the part of those who would benefit from the covenant (even Noah). God’s words here are to all people, to “ ‘every living creature of all flesh’ ” (Gen. 9:15, RSV) for “ ‘all future generations’ ” (Gen. 9:12, RSV). God’s words are universal, all-encompassing, regardless of whether anyone chooses to obey the Lord or not. In this sense, the concept of *covenant* here is not used as it is elsewhere in the Bible when talking about the relationship between God and humans.

**In** what sense does this covenant also reveal God’s grace? Who initiated this covenant? Who is the ultimate benefactor?

Though the covenant, as expressed here, does not come with specific obligations on our part (God’s part, of course, is never to destroy the world with a flood), how could our knowledge of what the rainbow symbolizes influence us to live in obedience to the Lord? In short, are there some implied obligations on our part when we look up into the sky and see the rainbow? Think of the whole context in which the rainbow came and the lessons we can learn from that account.

## “Only Noah Was Left”

“He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark” (*Gen. 7:23, RSV*).

In this text one finds the first mention of the concept of “the remnant” in the Scriptures. The word translated as “was left” comes from another word whose root forms are used many times in the Old Testament where the idea of a *remnant* is conveyed.

“ ‘And God sent me before you to preserve for you a *remnant* on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors’ ” (*Gen. 45:7, RSV; emphasis supplied*).

“And he *who is left* in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, every one who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem” (*Isa. 4:3, RSV; emphasis supplied*).

“In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover *the remnant which is left* of his people” (*Isa. 11:11, RSV; emphasis supplied*).

In all these cases, the italicized words are linked to the similar words “was left” found in Genesis 7:23, RSV.

**Look** at Genesis 7:23 and the other examples. How do you understand the concept of a remnant here? What are the surrounding conditions that led to a remnant? How does the covenant fit in with the idea of a remnant?

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At the time of the Flood, the Creator of the world became the Judge of the world. The nearing worldwide judgment raised the question whether all life on earth—even human life—would be destroyed. If not, who would be the survivors? Who would be the remnant?

In this case, it was Noah and his family. Yet, Noah’s salvation was linked to God’s covenant with him (*Gen. 6:18*)—a covenant that originated and was executed by a God of mercy and grace. They survived only because of what God did for them, however important their cooperation was. Whatever Noah’s covenant obligations were, and no matter how faithfully he executed them, his only hope was in God’s mercy.

**Based upon our understanding of last-day events, which includes a time when God will have a remnant (see Rev. 12:17), what parallels can we learn from the story of Noah that will help us prepare to be part of the remnant? In what ways are we making decisions every day that could impact just where we finally stand at that time?**



**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Flood,” pp. 90–104 and “After the Flood,” pp. 105–110, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The rainbow, a natural physical phenomenon, was a fitting symbol of God’s promise never to destroy the earth again by a flood. Inasmuch as the climatic conditions of the earth would be completely different after the Flood, and rains would in most parts of the world take the place of the former beneficent dew to moisten the soil, something was needed to quiet men’s fears each time rain began to fall. The spiritual mind can see in natural phenomena God’s revelations of Himself (see Rom. 1:20). Thus the rainbow is evidence to the believer that the rain will bring blessing and not universal destruction.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 265.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ “In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamour. Enlil heard the clamour and he said to the gods in council, ‘The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel.’ So the gods agreed to exterminate man.”—“The Story of the Flood” in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. N. K. Sanders (London: The Penguin Group, 1972), p. 108. Compare this reason for the Flood to the reason given in the Bible.
- ❷ Noah did more than warn his generation of God’s approaching judgment. The purpose of his warning was to help the people sense their need of salvation. Why are the truths of salvation generally unpopular? List and discuss some things that hinder many persons from accepting God’s plan for their salvation. (See *John 3:19; John 7:47, 48; John 12:42, 43; and James 4:4.*)

**Summary:** In this week’s study, we have noted that the covenants God made with Noah are the first to be discussed explicitly in the Bible. They display His gracious interest in the human family and His desire to enter into a saving relationship with them. God reaffirmed His covenant with Noah, and it was Noah’s commitment to God that shielded him from the prevailing apostasy and eventually saved him and his family from the devastating judgment of the Flood.

“This symbol [the rainbow] in the clouds is to confirm the belief of all, and establish their confidence in God, for it is a token of divine mercy and goodness to man; that although God has been provoked to destroy the earth by the Flood, yet His mercy still encompasseth the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 71.

## Made for Mission in Mexico

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Gustavo Taracena is not a pastor, but he has a passion for planting churches.

Gustavo, a 58-year-old retired customer service representative for a Mexican telecommunications company, praised God when his second church plant, located in La Huasteca, a small community on the outskirts of Villahermosa, Mexico, became a full-fledged church in 10 years. But he wasn't sure what to do next. He and his wife, Maria Hernandez, prayed. "What do You want us to do this coming year?" he prayed.

After praying for a few weeks, Gustavo learned from the district pastor about hopes to plant a church in Playas del Rosario, another small community outside the city. He prayed for three weeks and agreed to lead the project.

But where were they to meet? That problem was solved when a church member offered his house for the Sabbath meetings. He didn't live there, so Gustavo could use the house freely. It wouldn't cost a peso.

On the first Sabbath, two mothers and 12 children joined Gustavo and his wife for worship. Seeing so many people at the first meeting, he felt that God was blessing the project and he could move forward.

He organized a weeklong evangelistic series in the house church, and the number of children increased to 20. With so many children, Gustavo decided to conduct a special Sabbath School for children on Sabbath mornings and a worship service for both children and adults in the afternoons.

Trouble struck one of the mothers who attended every Sabbath. The owner of the house she rented threatened to evict her and her five children. "If you keep going to those meetings, you will have to leave," the owner said.

The mother kept going to the meetings, and she was evicted. But she was not discouraged. She found a new house to rent and continued worshipping. At the house church, worshipers prayed and intermittently fasted for the mother's former house owner. During a literature-distribution drive, the owner accepted an Adventist magazine and asked for prayer. A few weeks later, she accepted a loaf of sweet bread from a church member and asked for more prayers.

Gustavo, meanwhile, organized a second set of evangelistic meetings, this time in an Adventist church located a half mile (one kilometer) away in a neighboring community. A woman and a boy were baptized at the meetings, becoming the firstfruits of his church plant. The house church had its first two members just four months after opening. "By faith we know God will add more members and our small group will grow into a full-fledged church," he said.




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*Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering three years ago that helped expand the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Southeast Hospital in Villahermosa, Mexico.*

**Study Focus:** *Genesis 6****Part I: Overview***

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Noah responded to God's covenant by committing his life to God and opening his heart to God's love. The ark was a symbol of Noah's commitment to support the covenant he had agreed to, and God rewarded him by saving Noah's family from the final judgment of the antediluvian world—the Flood.

***Part II: Commentary***

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**The Sin Principle**

Contemplate the following three quotes, keeping Cain's sin in mind: "Sins are like circles in the water when a stone is thrown into it; one produces another. When anger was in Cain's heart, murder was not far off."—Philip Henry, in Frank S. Mead, *12,000 Religious Quotations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), p. 407. "Sin is a state of mind, not an outward act."—William Sewell, in Frank S. Mead, *12,000 Religious Quotations*, p. 409. "A merciful Creator still spared his [Cain's] life, and granted him opportunity for repentance. But Cain lived only to . . . become the head of a line of bold, abandoned sinners. This one apostate, led on by Satan, became a tempter to others; and his example and influence exerted their demoralizing power, until the earth became so corrupt and filled with violence as to call for its destruction."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 78.

**The Man Noah**

Like the bright Amaryllis lily that sprays its pleasing fragrance amid the thornbushes in the Holy Land, Noah's character revealed the scent of heaven during the defiant antediluvian era. The Hebrew meaning for *Noah* indicates that "Yahweh brings comfort." Like us, while Noah had been born a sinner, he had been consoled by Yahweh's faithfulness to the Adamic covenant. This was Noah's only means of hope and salvation. It was God's grace that prodded him as a young man to embrace an obedient lifestyle in the midst of decadent lawlessness. "Men before the Flood lived many hundreds of years, and *when one hundred years old they were considered but youths*. . . . They came upon the stage of action *from the ages of sixty to one hundred years*, about the time those who now live . . . have passed off the stage."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 1089, 1090; emphasis supplied.

### God's Covenant With Noah

“The statement in Genesis 6:18, though brief, contains profound concepts. It predicts provisions for the future of humankind. In establishing this covenant with the one to survive the Flood with his family, God dispenses His bountiful grace and mercy. Humankind's security in the present and assurance of salvation in the future arise out of God's grace and the divine action in their behalf. . . .

“The typical expression for the making of a covenant does not appear in this passage, namely, . . . ‘to cut a covenant,’ or . . . ‘to make a covenant.’ Here the term used is *to establish (heqîm)*. A careful investigation of this term in connection with covenant-making reveals the significance of ‘to maintain’ or ‘to confirm’ (compare Deuteronomy 9:5; 27:26; 1 Samuel 15:11; 2 Samuel 7:25; 2 Kings 23:3, 24; etc.). This discovery gives us the impression that God's establishment of His covenant implies a maintaining of a commitment to which God had pledged Himself earlier.”—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, p. 29.

### Sign of the Rainbow

Accordingly, in the covenant-of-grace saga, there are two diverse portraits and venues of the biblical, varicolored rainbow. On one hand, in Genesis 9, Christ revealed a cosmic rainbow as a sign of His mercy and grace to the Noahic remnant who survived the Deluge. On the other hand, Christ will reveal to the remnant, at the end of days, the unique rainbow surrounding God's throne. (*See Ezek. 1:26–28 and Dan. 12:1, 2.*)

“Then a *rainbow, shining with the glory from the throne of God*, spans the heavens and seems to *encircle* each praying company. The angry multitudes are suddenly arrested. Their mocking cries die away. The objects of their murderous rage are forgotten. With fearful forebodings they *gaze upon the symbol of God's covenant* and long to be shielded from its overpowering brightness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 636, emphasis supplied. (*See Rev. 6:13–17.*)

### Only Noah Was Left

“The first explicit mention of a remnant in the Bible occurs in Genesis 7:23: ‘Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark’ (RSV). The word translated ‘was left’ derives from the Hebrew root *sa'ar*, of which different forms express the remnant idea in the Old Testament. . . .

“We cannot overlook the fact that the remnant who survived the first worldwide catastrophe were people of faith and trust (see Genesis 6:9 and 7:1). Because the Bible used the [Noahic] Flood as a type of the end-time destruction, this observation has much significance.”—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, p. 31.

“Some of the carpenters he [Noah] employed in building the ark, believed the message, but died before the flood; others of Noah’s converts backslid.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 504.

“One man’s assertion against the wisdom of thousands! They would not credit the warning. . . . Christ declares that there will exist similar unbelief concerning His second coming. . . . When the luxury of the world becomes the luxury of the church; when the marriage bells are chiming, and all are looking forward to many years of worldly prosperity—then, suddenly as the lightning flashes . . . will come the end of their bright visions and delusive hopes.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 338, 339.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Reflection:** One of the finest sinful men who lived in ancient Athens was Aristides. Aristides was just, kind, and fair. So, why did the majority vote to banish him? The consensus was that they were tired of hearing Aristides called “the just.” Aristides’s crime was that his goodness contrasted too sharply with the “badness” of others.

- 1. As in the case of Aristides, had it not been for the “goodness” of Noah, we might never have realized how bad the world was before the Flood. As Noah experienced, reflecting Christ has its price. Consider the price you have to pay to be a true Christian today. Do we, like Aristides and Noah, have the resilience necessary to endure the negative treatment that we may receive? How so?**

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- 2. Romans 12:2 urges us not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed apart from it. Noah is a classic example of how a person can do this. What can we learn from Noah’s life that will enable us not to be tempted by the sin of conformity? Do you think God expects us, as He did Noah, to be concerned about the souls of others? Explain your answer in the context of modern challenges to witnessing.**

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3. Had there been a hospital for the mentally ill in Noah's time, his "friends" surely would have committed him. Everything he said and did spelled "lunacy." God's wisdom is often looked upon as foolishness by this world. As covenant players, we are subject to ridicule and accusations. How can we be prepared for such treatment? Think of at least three Bible promises you can claim during such times.

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4. Genesis 6:6 states that God was so appalled by the evil of the antediluvian world that He regretted creating humankind. What does it mean that God felt regret? Does God's regret suggest that He is capable of making mistakes?

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5. In Genesis 6:9, Noah is referred to as upright and blameless. Were these qualities that Noah possessed innately within himself, apart from God? What is the nature of the righteousness Noah was said to have?

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6. Does the fact that God seeks to have a covenant with human beings suggest that He “needs” us somehow? Explain. In what sense might this be the case?

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7. The concept of the remnant is a difficult one for many people, suggesting arrogance and triumphalism. Why can no attitudes of arrogance or triumphalism be justified in the light of the biblical idea of the remnant?

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8. What does the rainbow in Genesis 9:12–17 suggest about God’s means of influencing the human race to choose Him?

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# An Everlasting Covenant



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 3:14; Gen. 17:1–6; Gen. 41:45; Dan. 1:7; Gen. 15:7–18; Gen. 17:1–14; Rev. 14:6, 7.*

**Memory Text:** “I [God] will establish my covenant between me and you [Abraham] and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.” (*Genesis 17:7, RSV*).

How many remember distinctly in childhood a sickness or a touch of pneumonia that made us very ill, with the potential for something even worse? In the long, feverish night, we would awaken from a half sleep to see our mother or father sitting in a chair beside our bed in the soft glow of the night-light.

Just so, in a figurative, human sense, God sat by the bedside of a sin-sick world as moral darkness began to deepen in the centuries after the Flood. For this reason, He called out Abram and planned to establish through His faithful servant a people to whom He could entrust a knowledge of Himself and give salvation.

Therefore, God entered into a covenant with Abram and his posterity that emphasized in more detail the divine plan to save humankind from the results of sin. The Lord was not going to leave His world unattended, not with it in such dire need. This week, we will look at the unfolding of more covenant promises.

**The Week at a Glance:** What is the name of God? What does it mean? What was the significance of the names God used to identify Himself to Abram? What names did He use to identify Himself? Why did God change Abram's name to Abraham? Why are names important? What conditions, or obligations, were attached to the covenant?

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 24.

## Yahweh and the Abrahamic Covenant

**“And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it” (Gen. 15:7).**

Names can sometimes be like trademarks. They become so closely associated in our minds with certain characteristics that when we hear the name we immediately recall these traits. What traits come to mind, for instance, when you think of these names: Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, or Dorcas? Each one is associated with certain characteristics and ideals.

During Bible times, people of the Near East attached great importance to the meaning of names. “The Hebrews always thought of a name as indicating either the personal characteristics of the one named, or the thoughts and emotions of the one giving the name, or attendant circumstances at the time the name was given.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 523.

When God first entered into a covenant relationship with Abram, He made Himself known to the patriarch under the name YHWH (pronounced Yahweh and translated as LORD, in capitals, in the King James Version [*Gen. 15:7*]). Thus, Genesis 15:7 reads literally, “I am YHWH who brought thee out of . . .”

The name YHWH, though appearing 6,828 times in the Old Testament, is somewhat shrouded in mystery. It seems to be a form of the verb *hayah*, ‘to be,’ in which case it would mean “the Eternal One,” “the Existent One,” “the Self-Existing One,” “the Self-Sufficient One,” or “the One who lives eternally.” The divine attributes that seem to be emphasized by this title are those of self-existence and faithfulness. They point to the Lord as the living God, the Source of life, in contrast with the gods of the heathen, which had no existence apart from the imagination of their worshipers.

God Himself explains the meaning of Yahweh in Exodus 3:14: “‘I AM WHO I AM’ ” (*RSV, NASB*). This meaning expresses the reality of God’s unconditioned existence, while it also suggests His rule over past, present, and future.

Yahweh also is God’s personal name. The identification of Yahweh as the One who brought Abram out of Ur refers to the announcement of God’s covenant with him in Genesis 12:1–3. God wants Abram to know His name, because that name reveals aspects of His identity, personal nature, and character—and from this knowledge we can learn to trust in His promises (*Ps. 9:10, Ps. 91:14*).

**When you think of or hear the name Yahweh, what traits or characteristics automatically come to mind? Those of love, kindness, and care, or those of fear, strictness, and discipline? What thoughts automatically come to mind when you think of the name Jesus?**

## 'El-Shaddai

**“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect”** (*Gen. 17:1*).

Yahweh had appeared to Abram several times before (*Gen. 12:1, 7; Gen. 13:14; Gen. 15:1, 7, 18*). Now, in the above text, Yahweh again appears to Abram (“the LORD appeared to Abram”), presenting Himself as “Almighty God”—a name that is used with two exceptions only in the books of Genesis and Job. The name “Almighty God” consists first of *'El*, the basic name for God used among the Semites. Though the exact meaning of *Shaddai* is not entirely certain, the translation “Almighty” seems the most accurate. (*Compare Isa. 13:6 and Joel 1:15*.) The crucial idea in the use of this name seems to be that of contrasting the might and power of God with the weakness and frailty of humanity.

**Read** Genesis 17:1–6, which helps place everything in the larger context. Why would the Lord at this time want to stress to Abram His might and power? What was God saying that would require Abram to trust in that might and power? Look particularly at Genesis 17:6.

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A literal translation of Genesis 17:1–6 would be: “Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said, ‘I am *'El-Shaddai*; walk before Me, and be thou perfect; and I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. . . . And thou shalt be a father of a multitude of nations, . . . and I will make thee exceedingly fruitful.’ ” This same name also appears in Genesis 28:3, where Isaac says that *'El-Shaddai* will bless Jacob, make him fruitful, and multiply him.

A similar promise of *'El-Shaddai* is found in Genesis 35:11, Genesis 43:14, and Genesis 49:25, passages that suggest the bountifulness exercised by God: *'El*, the God of power and authority, and *Shaddai*, the God of inexhaustible riches, riches that He is willing to bestow upon those who seek Him in faith and obedience.

**It has been said that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, the idea being that the name does not matter. Yet, how much comfort and hope would you have if the Lord’s name was “The Frail God” or “The Weak God”? Look at the text for today. Replace “Almighty God” with these two other names. What would it do for your faith and trust in Him if the Lord were to present Himself to us in that manner? At the same time, how does the name *'El-Shaddai* give us comfort?**

## From Abram to Abraham (Gen. 17:4, 5)

Though the names of God come with spiritual and theological significance, such usage does not end with God alone. Names of people in the ancient Near East were not just meaningless forms of identification, as often they are to us. To name a girl *Mary* or *Susy* does not make much of a difference today. For the ancient Semites, however, human names came heavy-laden with spiritual significance. All Semitic names of people have meaning and usually consist of a phrase or short sentence comprised of a wish or an expression of gratitude on the part of the parent. For example, *Daniel* means “God is my judge”; *Joel* means “Yahweh is God”; *Nathan* means “Gift of God.”

Because of the significance attached to names, names would often be changed to reflect a radical change in someone’s life and circumstances.

**Look up the following texts. What situations are they addressing, and why were the names changed in these situations?**

*Gen. 32:28* \_\_\_\_\_

*Gen. 41:45* \_\_\_\_\_

*Dan. 1:7* \_\_\_\_\_

In one sense, however, it is not that hard, even for modern minds, to understand the significance of what a person is called. There are subtle and, at times, not-so-subtle effects. If someone is constantly called “stupid” or “ugly,” and if those are the appellations used for them all the time by a lot of people—sooner or later those names could have an impact on how the person views himself or herself. In the same way, by giving people certain names or changing their names, it seems possible to influence how they would view themselves and thus influence how they would act.

With this in mind, it is not so hard to understand why God would want to change Abram to Abraham. Abram means “Father is exalted”; God changed it to Abraham, which means “Father of a multitude.” When you look at the covenant promise in which God says “ ‘I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you’ ” (*Gen. 17:6, RSV*), the name change makes more sense. Perhaps it was God’s way of helping Abraham trust in the covenant promise, which was being made to a 99-year-old man married to an old woman who had up until this time been barren. In short, God did it to help increase Abraham’s faith in God’s promises to him.

## Covenant Stages *(Gen. 12:1, 2)*

In those two verses, the first stage of God's covenant promise to Abram (there are three) is revealed. God approached Abram, gave him a command and then made him a promise. The *approach* expresses God's gracious election of Abram to be the first major figure of His special covenant of grace. The *command* involves the test of total trust in God (*Heb. 11:8*). The *promise* (*Gen. 12:1–3, 7*), though made specifically to Abram's descendants, ultimately includes a promise to the whole human race (*Gen. 12:3, Gal. 3:6–9*).

**The** second stage of God's covenant with Abram appears in Genesis 15:7–18. In what verses do we find some of the same steps that appeared in the first stage?

The approach of God to man—verses? \_\_\_\_\_

The call to human obedience—verses? \_\_\_\_\_

The divine promise—verses? \_\_\_\_\_

In the solemn ritual of the second stage, the Lord appeared to Abram and passed between the carefully arranged pieces of animals. Each of the three animals was slaughtered and divided, and the two halves were placed one against the other, with a space between. The birds were killed but not divided. Those entering into the covenant were to walk between the divided pieces, symbolically vowing perpetual obedience to the provisions thus solemnly agreed upon.

**Describe** what took place during the third and final stage of divine covenant making with Abraham. (*See Gen. 17:1–14.*)

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The meaning of the name Abraham underscores God's desire and design to save all peoples. The "many nations" would include *both* Jews and Gentiles. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that the true descendants of Abraham are those who have the faith of Abraham and who trust in the merits of the promised Messiah. (*See Gal. 3:7, 29.*) Thus, as far back as Abraham, the Lord's intention was to save as many human beings as He could, whatever nations they lived in. No doubt, it's no different today.

**Read Revelation 14:6, 7, the first angel's message. What parallels can you find between what the angel is saying and what happened in the Abrahamic covenant? In what ways are the issues the same?**

## Covenant Obligations

**“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19).**

As we have seen so far, the covenant is always a covenant of grace, of God doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. There is no exception in the covenant with Abraham.

In His grace, God had chosen Abraham as His instrument to assist in proclaiming the plan of salvation to the world. God’s fulfillment of His covenant promises was, however, linked to Abraham’s willingness to do righteously and to obey Him by faith. Without that obedience on Abraham’s part, God could not use him.

Genesis 18:19 demonstrates how grace and law are related. It opens with *grace* (“I know him”) and is followed by the fact that Abraham is someone who will obey the Lord and have his family obey, as well. Faith and works, then, appear here in a close union, as they must. (See *James 2:17*.)

**Notice,** however, the phrasing of Genesis 18:19, particularly the last clause. What is it saying here about Abraham’s obedience? Though obedience is not the means of salvation, what importance is it given here? According to this text, could the covenant be fulfilled without it? Explain your answer.

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The blessings of the covenant could not be enjoyed or maintained unless certain conditions were met by the beneficiaries. Though the conditions were not needed to establish the covenant, meeting them was to be the response of love, faith, and obedience. It was to be the manifestation of a relationship between humankind and God. Obedience was the means by which God could fulfill His covenant promises to the people.

Covenant breaking, through disobedience, is unfaithfulness to an established relationship. When the covenant is broken, what is broken is not the condition of bestowal but the condition of fulfillment.

**In your own experience with the Lord, can you see why obedience is so important? Can you think of any examples, either from the Bible or from your own experience, where disobedience makes the fulfillment of covenant promises impossible? If so, what are they, and, more important, what is the remedy?**

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Call of Abraham,” pp. 125–131, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Jew and Gentile,” pp. 188–200, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

The rainbow is a sign of God’s covenant with Noah. Read Genesis 17:10 to discover what was the sign of God’s covenant with Abraham. Circumcision “was destined: (1) to distinguish the seed of Abraham from the Gentiles (*Eph. 2:11*), (2) to perpetuate the memory of Jehovah’s covenant (*Gen. 17:11*), (3) to foster the cultivation of moral purity (*Deut. 10:16*), (4) to represent righteousness by faith (*Rom. 4:11*), (5) to symbolize circumcision of the heart (*Rom. 2:29*), and (6) to foreshadow the Christian rite of baptism (*Col. 2:11, 12*).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 322, 323.

The rainbow will remain as a sign of God’s promise until the end of the world, but the sign of circumcision will not. According to the apostle Paul, circumcision was received by Abraham as a token of the righteousness he had received by faith in God (*Rom. 4:11*). However, through the centuries, circumcision came to signify salvation by obedience to the law. By New Testament times, circumcision had lost its biblical significance. Instead, the essential element is faith in Jesus Christ, which leads to an obedient, transformed life. Read Galatians 5:6; Galatians 6:15; and 1 Corinthians 7:18, 19.

### Discussion Questions:

**1** Discuss the relationship between faith and works. Can there be one without the other? If not, why not?

**2** “Many are still tested as was Abraham. They do not hear the voice of God speaking directly from the heavens, but He calls them by the teachings of His Word and the events of His providence. They may be required to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor, to leave congenial and profitable associations, and separate from kindred, to enter upon what appears to be only a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice. God has a work for them to do; but a life of ease and the influence of friends and kindred would hinder the development of the very traits essential for its accomplishment. He calls them away from human influences and aid, and leads them to feel the need of His help, and to depend upon Him alone, that He may reveal Himself to them. Who is ready at the call of Providence to renounce cherished plans and familiar associations?”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 126, 127. Discuss any contemporary examples of those you know who heeded this same call.

**Summary:** God called Abraham into a special relationship with Him, one that would reveal the plan of salvation to the world.



## God Always Has a Way

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

David never cared about God until he lost his business to his best friend amid a bitter court battle. All hope seemed lost. He decided to study theology at a Seventh-day Adventist college in the Philippines.

David, who grew up in an affluent family, had no desire to become a minister. He simply wanted to gain a better understanding of God. David moved from his atheist homeland to the Philippines. For his personal safety, Adventist Mission is not identifying David by his full name or providing some other details.

After months of theology classes, David was still wondering whether he had a future when he joined a mandatory, month-long evangelistic campaign, part of the requirement for his education. He preached evenings and spoke one-on-one with attendees. One schoolteacher told him that she had longed to be baptized for many years but feared that her husband would kill her if she became a Christian. At her request, David began Bible studies. Finally, she was baptized.

“Aren’t you afraid that your husband will kill you?” David asked afterward.

“He may kill me,” the woman replied. “But I still wanted to be baptized.”

David was astonished by her faith in the face of death. He had never seen such faith. Her husband did not kill her.

David also befriended a boy who came every night and wanted to be baptized. David went to the boy’s house to ask for permission, but the parents, who belonged to another Christian denomination, turned him away. David visited many times, but the parents would not relent.

Six months later, an Adventist pastor sought out David at the college to tell an unusual story. A family of four showed up at his church one Sabbath and asked to be baptized. He quizzed the parents, son, and daughter about their knowledge of the Bible and saw that they understood the church’s beliefs. But he couldn’t figure out how they knew the Bible so well. No local church members knew the family, and no one had given them Bible studies.

Finally, the pastor asked, “How did you hear about the Adventist Church?”

“Evangelistic meetings were held in our town six months ago,” the father said. “A foreigner came to our house many times to talk about our son, who wanted to be baptized. We strongly opposed his baptism. But after six months of consideration, our whole family has decided to join the church.”



David couldn’t believe his ears. He realized that God always has a way, even when everything seems hopeless. He gave his heart to Jesus and became a pastor.

“My life has been a journey,” he said. “I have learned to trust God and to work for Him.”

**Study Focus:** *Genesis 17:7, RSV****Part I: Overview***

As with Noah, God called Abraham into a special covenant relationship that held many of the same parameters as God’s covenant with Noah. However, through the covenant with Abraham, God would set the foundation for the covenant of salvation with all humanity, at least all of humanity that will be saved.

***Part II: Commentary***

In Genesis 15:7, God provides a self-identification to Abraham as *Yahweh, the personal God*. How could Abraham think that management of his life was none of God’s business when God introduced Himself as *Abraham’s personal God*?

**Yahweh and the Abrahamic Covenant**

The covenant affirmed Abraham’s submission to divine governance over his most personal affairs. How could Abraham receive the benefits of this covenant if he maintained a self-serving attitude? He couldn’t, and neither can we. As we study the story of Abraham, there is a tendency to lose sight of the fact that the Abrahamic covenant was about a faith that worked. As with Abraham, so it must be with us too.

**’El-Shaddai**

*’El-Shaddai* first appears in the Hebrew text of Genesis 17:1, 2, associated with Abraham. The word for God here is *’El—’El-Shaddai*, often translated as “God Almighty.”

Let’s break it down a bit. The word *’El* is related to *Elohim* (“In the beginning *Elohim* created the heavens and the earth.”), and it stands for omnipotence, might, and transcendence. This title for God, *Elohim*, is seen all through the Genesis Creation account. The word *’El*, from it, is translated “God” about two hundred times; it, too, connoted the powerful God.

*Shaddai*—it means “breast,” giving the idea of one who supplies, who nourishes, and who satisfies. Connected with the word *’El*, it portrays the notion of “the mighty and powerful One who can supply and nourish.”

**From Abram to Abraham**

In Genesis 17:3–5, the name change indicated a change of relationship. Thus, a superior relationship had been established. “Abram was the first

of several men whose names God changed. Names were of much greater importance to the ancients than they are to us. All Semitic names have meanings, and usually consist of a phrase or sentence that expresses a wish, or perhaps gratitude, on the part of the parent. In view of the importance people themselves attached to names, God changed the names of certain men to make them harmonize with their experiences, past or future. Abram, meaning ‘exalted father,’ does not appear in this form elsewhere in the Bible, but is found under the form Abiram, meaning ‘my father is exalted’ (see Num. 16:1; 1 Kings 16:34).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 321.

### Covenant Stages

Involved in the covenant-stage saga, “God made a three-stage covenant with Abraham. The first is reported in Genesis 12:1–3; the second in Genesis 15:1–21; and the third in Genesis 17:1–14.”—Gerhard M. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant*, p. 34. In Deuteronomy 10:16, this covenant also was symbolized in the sign of circumcision: “And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and you shall not harden your neck any more.”—*The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*, vol. 1, p. 489. (See Deut. 10:16.)

The term *circumcise* in Hebrew terminology is translated as *mool*, which meant to cut off the foreskin of a Hebrew male, after birth on the eighth day. Thus, the spiritual significance of the number 8 represents spiritual regeneration in a Yahweh of new beginnings. With the idea that Israel’s foreskin of worldliness was to be severed, this spiritual sign was designed to represent Israel’s loyal allegiance to Yahweh. Henceforth, ancient Israel received a divine invitation to participate in a regenerated relationship with Yahweh.

### Covenant Obligations

“For I have known him, in order that he may command his sons and his house after him; and that they may observe the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice, in order that Jehovah may bring on Abraham that which He has spoken of him.”—*The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*, vol. 1, p. 40. (See Gen. 18:19.)

The beauty of this passage is that it is bathed with the divine prowess of ‘El-Shaddai to accomplish what unbelief deems as impossible. It was divine insight that energized Abraham to shepherd Isaac with his disciplined rod of seasoned nurturing. Thus, after Abraham’s name was made great, his self-denial glittered more and more.

How? Why?

Because self-interest had been consumed in submission to the divine will so that he was willing to treat his “only begotten son” as a sacrificial lamb offering. Abraham’s first “offering” thus typified that “there is

nothing too precious to be given to God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1094.

For Abraham, “This was the primary reason for naming the scene of this event Jehovah-jireh. It was a constant reminder of the wonderful grace of the Jehovah who had wrought this deliverance. . . . What a great and glorious deliverance it was that Jehovah’s grace had provided, and how unexpected and dramatic! Man’s extremity is ever God’s opportunity, not only for deliverance but to teach also wonderful lessons of His purpose as well as providence.”—Nathan Stone, *Names of God* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1944), pp. 62, 63.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Reflection:** The difference between the extraordinary doctor and a good doctor is the ability to remember names and faces in addition to medical problems. Instead of remembering only the gout, the extraordinary doctor remembers the woman anxious to be well so she will be able to care for her newborn. Rather than remembering only the broken bone, the extraordinary doctor remembers the man worried about losing his job. Names and people—that is what Jesus is all about.

- 1. Entire sections of the Bible are filled with just names and connections. Back then, people took names seriously. In that light, explain the psychological and spiritual implications of God changing Abram’s name to Abraham. Why did God bother to explain the significance of His own name? What difference did the significance of His name make to His partners in the covenant relationship?**

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- 2. In biblical times, the change of a name often brought a change in status. How can you apply this concept to what happens when you are born again?**

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3. Where we stand in God's holy presence depends on how intimately we know Him. God's promises are gestures of intimacy. How should we respond? As Abraham traveled through strange and distant lands, his covenant with God was a source of encouragement and companionship. How are God's promises today? Share with the class your favorite Bible promise and a time when that promise made the difference between success and failure in your spiritual growth.

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4. The Bible gives Jesus many titles. Pick one that is most meaningful to you. Write down reasons why you relate to that particular title. Share your list with the class as a witness of what Jesus means to you.

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5. Jesus does not just know your name; He knows your every thought and even keeps track of every hair that you lose or that turns gray. Does this make you feel uncomfortable or secure? Explain.

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6. In a variety of ways God attempts to communicate the truth about His nature and character to us. How, then, is it possible for us to acquire distorted, false, and even perverse concepts of what God is

like, and, more important, how can we correct them?

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7. In Genesis 17:1, God is referred to as 'El-Shaddai, or Almighty God. How would you answer someone who claimed that it is impossible for God to be all-good and all-powerful at the same time? Is there any contradiction, or do these attributes support each other?

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8. In Genesis 17:4, 5, God changed Abram's name to Abraham ("father of many nations"). In what sense is it possible for people from a variety of backgrounds to be descendants of Abraham?

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9. If God is all-merciful and all-forgiving, why is obedience to His commandments still necessary for humans in covenant with Him? Does He need our obedience, or do we need to be obedient? Explain.

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# Children of the Promise



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 15:1–3, Isa. 25:8, 1 Cor. 2:9, Rev. 22:1–5, 1 Pet. 2:9, Gen. 11:4, Gen. 12:2.*

**Memory Text:** “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (*Matthew 28:20*).

A father and his 10-year-old daughter were spending their holiday at the seashore. One day they went out to enjoy a swim in the ocean, and although they were both good swimmers, some distance out from the shore they became separated. The father, realizing that they were being carried out to sea by the tide, called to his child: ‘Mary, I’m going to shore for help. If you get tired, turn on your back. You can float all day that way. I’ll come back for you.’

“Before long, many searchers and boats were scurrying over the face of the water hunting for one small girl. Hundreds of people on the shore had heard the news and were waiting anxiously. It was four hours before they found her, far from land, but she was calmly floating on her back and not at all frightened. Cheers and tears of joy and relief greeted the rescuers when they came back to land with their precious burden, but the child took it all calmly. She seemed to think it was strange the way they acted. She said, ‘Father said I could float all day on my back and that he would come for me, so I just swam and floated, because I knew he’d come.’”—H. M. S. Richards, “When Jesus Comes Back,” *Voice of Prophecy News*, March 1949, p. 5.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why did the Lord refer to Himself as Abram’s Shield? How were “all the families of the earth” to be blessed through Abraham? What is the greatest of all the covenant promises?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 1.

## Thy Shield

“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (*Gen. 15:1*).

**Read** Genesis 15:1–3. Think of the context in which this message was given. Why would the first thing the Lord says to Abram be “Fear not”? What would Abram have to fear?

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What’s particularly interesting here is that the Lord says to Abram, “I am thy shield.” The use of the personal pronouns shows the personal nature of the relationship. God will relate to him one-on-one, the way He will to all of us.

The designation of God as a “Shield” appears here for the first time in the Bible and is the only time God uses it to reveal Himself, even if other Bible passages use the term to speak *about* God (*Deut. 33:29, Ps. 18:30, Ps. 84:11, Ps. 144:2*).

**When** God calls Himself someone’s shield, what does that mean? Did it mean something to Abram that it might not mean to us now? Can we claim that promise for ourselves? Does it mean no physical harm will come? In what ways is God a shield? How do you understand that image?

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“Christ has not a casual interest in us but an interest stronger than a mother for her child. . . . Our Saviour has purchased us by human suffering and sorrow, by insult, reproach, abuse, mockery, rejection and death. He is watching over you, trembling child of God. He will make you secure under His protection. . . . Our weakness in human nature will not bar our access to the heavenly Father, for He [Christ] died to make intercession for us.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 77.

**From all outward appearances, Rolando had been a faithful follower of the Lord. Then, suddenly, he died unexpectedly. What happened to God as his shield? Or must we understand the idea of God as our shield in a different manner? Explain. What does God always promise to shield us from? (See 1 Cor. 10:13.)**



## The Messianic Promise: Part 1

“In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (*Gen. 28:14*).

“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:29*).

More than once the Lord said to Abraham that in his seed, his offspring, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (*see also Gen. 12:3, Gen. 18:18, Gen. 22:18*). This wonderful covenant promise is repeated because, of all of the promises, this is the most important one, the most enduring one, the one that makes all the others worthwhile. In one sense, this was a promise of the rise of the Jewish nation, through whom the Lord wanted to teach “all the families of the earth” about the true God and His plan of salvation. Yet, the promise reaches complete fulfillment only in Jesus Christ, who came from the seed of Abraham, the One who would at the cross pay for the sins of “all the families of the earth.”

**Think** about the covenant promise made after the Flood in which the Lord promised not to destroy the world with water again. What ultimate good would this be without the promise of redemption found in Jesus? What ultimate good would any of God’s promises be without the promise of eternal life found in Christ?

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**How** do you understand the notion that in Abraham, through Jesus, “all the families of the earth” would be blessed? What does that mean?

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No question, the covenant promise of the world’s Savior is the greatest of all God’s promises. The Redeemer Himself becomes the *means* by which the obligations of the covenant arrangement are met and all of its other promises are realized. All, Jew or Gentile, who enter into union with Him are accounted as Abraham’s true family and inheritors of the promise (*Gal. 3:8, 9, 27–29*)—that is, the promise of eternal life in a sinless environment where evil, pain, and suffering will never again arise. Can you think of a better promise than that?

What is it about the promise of eternal life in a world without sin and suffering that has such an attraction for us? Could it be that we long for it because that’s what we were originally created for and that by longing for it we are longing for something that is basic to our nature?

## The Messianic Promise: Part 2

“To enjoy true happiness we must travel into a very far country, and even out of ourselves.”—Thomas Browne.

**Look** at that above quote, written in the 1600s. Do you agree or disagree? Read it in the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and of Revelation 3:12.

Augustine wrote of the human condition: “This life of ours—if a life so full of such great ills can properly be called a life—bears witness to the fact that, from its very start, the race of mortal men has been a race condemned. Think, first, of the dreadful abyss of ignorance from which all error flows and so engulfs the sons of Adam in a darksome pool that no one can escape without the toll of toils and tears and fears. Then, take our very love for all those things that prove so vain and poisonous and breed so many heartaches, troubles, griefs, and fears; such insane joys in discord, strife, and wars; such fraud and theft and robbery; such perfidy and pride, envy and ambition, homicide and murder, cruelty and savagery, lawlessness and lust; all the shameless passions of the impure—fornication and adultery, incest and unnatural sins, rape and countless other uncleannesses too nasty to be mentioned; the sins against religion—sacrilege and heresy, blasphemy and perjury; the iniquities against our neighbors—calumnies and cheating, lies and false witness, violence to persons and property; the injustices of the courts and the innumerable other miseries and maladies that fill the world, yet escape attention.”—Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1958), p. 519.

Augustine’s quote could apply to most modern cities today; yet, he wrote it more than fifteen hundred years ago. Little about humanity has changed, which is why people want an escape.

Fortunately, however tough our situation now, the future is bright—but only because of what God did for us through the life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ—the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant promise made to Abraham that, in his seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

**Look at the quote from Augustine. Write something in your own words to describe the sad situation in the world today. At the same time, look up whatever Bible texts you can find that talk about what God has promised us in Jesus Christ (for example, Isa. 25:8, 1 Cor. 2:9, and Rev. 22:2–5). Dwell on those promises. Make them your own. Only then can you truly grasp what the covenant is all about.**

## A Great and Mighty Nation . . .

Not only did God promise Abraham that in him would all the families of the earth be blessed, but the Lord also said that He would make of him a “great and mighty nation” (*Gen. 18:18*; see also *Gen. 12:2*, *Gen. 46:3*)—quite a promise to a man married to a woman past child-bearing age. Thus, when Abraham was without descendants, much less a son, God promised him both.

Yet, this promise was not completely fulfilled while Abraham was alive; in fact, neither Isaac nor Jacob saw it come to pass. God repeated it to Jacob, with the added information that the promise would be fulfilled in Egypt (*Gen. 46:3*), though Jacob did not see it. Eventually, of course, that promise was fulfilled.

**Why** did the Lord want to make a special nation out of Abraham’s seed? Did the Lord just want another country of a certain ethnic origin? What purposes was this nation to fulfill? Read Exodus 19:5, 6; Isaiah 60:1–3; and Deuteronomy 4:6–8. On the lines below, write out your answer:

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It seems evident from Scripture that God purposed to attract the nations of the world to Himself through the witness of Israel, which would be, under His blessing, a happy, healthy, and holy people. Such a nation would demonstrate the blessing that attends obedience to the will of the Creator. The multitudes of earth would be drawn to worship the true God (*Isa. 56:7*). Thus, the attention of humanity would be drawn toward Israel, their God, and the Messiah who was to appear in their midst, the Savior of the world.

“The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them. Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God were to be dispossessed. But it was God’s purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 290.

**Can you see any parallels between what the Lord wanted to do through Israel and what He wants to do through our church? If so, what are those parallels? Read 1 Peter 2:9.**

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## “Make Your Name Great”

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing” (*Gen. 12:2*).

**In** Genesis 12:2, God promises to make Abram’s name great—that is, to make him famous. Why would the Lord want to do that for any sinner, no matter how obedient and faithful? Who deserves a “great” name? (*See Rom. 4:1–5 and James 2:21–24.*) Did God bestow greatness on Abram for his own personal benefit, or did it represent something more? Explain.

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**Compare** Genesis 11:4 with Genesis 12:2. What is the big difference between the ideas presented in these two texts? In what ways does one represent “salvation by works” and the other “salvation by faith”?

However much the plan of salvation rests only upon the work of Christ in our behalf, we—as recipients of God’s grace—are, nevertheless, still involved. We have a role to play; our free choice comes into prominence. The drama of the ages, the battle between Christ and Satan, is still being played out in and through us. Both humanity and angels are watching what is happening with us in the conflict (*1 Cor. 4:9*). Thus, who we are, what we say, what we do, far from having no importance beyond our own immediate sphere, has implications that can, in a sense, reverberate across the universe. By our words, our actions, even our attitudes, we can help bring glory to the Lord, who has done so much for us, or we can bring shame upon Him and His name. Thus, when the Lord said to Abraham that He would make his name great, He surely was not talking about it in the same way the world talks about someone as having a great name. What makes a name great in the eyes of God is character, faith, obedience, humility, and love for others, traits that might often be respected in the world but are not usually the factors the world would deem as making someone’s name great.

**Look at some of the men and women who have “great” names in the world today, be it actors, politicians, artists, the wealthy, or whoever. What is it about these people that has made them famous? Contrast that with the greatness of Abraham. What does that tell us about how perverted the world’s concept of greatness is? How much of that worldly attitude impacts our view of greatness, as well?**

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “Abraham in Canaan,” pp. 132–144, and “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. . . . But he did not hesitate to obey the call. He had no question to ask concerning the land of promise. . . . God has spoken, and His servant must obey; the happiest place on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 126.

When Abram entered Canaan, the Lord appeared to him and made it clear that he was to sojourn in the land that would be given to his descendants (*Gen. 12:7*). God repeated this promise several times (*see Gen. 13:14, 15, 17; Gen. 15:13, 16, 18; Gen. 17:8; Gen. 28:13, 15; Gen. 35:12*). Some four hundred years later, in fulfillment of the promise (*Gen. 15:13, 16*), the Lord announced to Moses that He would bring Israel out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey (*Exod. 3:8, 17; Exod. 6:8*). God repeated the promise to Joshua (*Josh. 1:3*), and in David’s day it was largely, but not completely, fulfilled (*Gen. 15:18–21, 2 Sam. 8:1–14, 1 Kings 4:21, 1 Chron. 19:1–19*).

Now read Hebrews 11:9, 10, 13–16. These verses make it clear that Abraham and the other faithful patriarchs viewed Canaan as a symbol, or a foreshadowing, of the ultimate settled home of God’s redeemed people. In the sin situation, no permanent home is possible. Life is fleeting, like “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (*James 4:14, RSV*). As the spiritual descendants of Abraham, we, too, must realize that “here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (*Heb. 13:14, NIV*). The certainty of the future life with Christ keeps us steady in this present world of change and decay.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① What effect should God’s promise of a new earth have on our personal Christian experience? (*Compare Matt. 5:5; 2 Cor. 4:17, 18; Rev. 21:9, 10; and Rev. 22:17.*)
- ② “True greatness was to result from compliance with God’s commands and cooperation with His divine purpose.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 293. What does this statement mean?

**Summary:** Promises! How precious they are to the believer! Will they be fulfilled? Faith answers yes.

## Trusting God or Science

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

The physician showed the 3-D ultrasound images to Dr. Hernando Diaz. “You’re a physician,” he said. “Here is the evidence. End the pregnancy.”

Hernando’s pregnant wife, Erica, wept. The images showed that their baby had Potter’s syndrome, a rare condition associated with kidney failure, abnormal limbs, and an unusual facial appearance, including widely separated eyes.

As a physician, Hernando understood that the physician was right. But as a Christian, he wondered what to do. The baby wouldn’t live if the 32-week pregnancy were ended, but there might be hope if they waited. Should he trust science or God? “God will have the last word,” he said.

Complications beset the pregnancy, and the physician recommended a C-section to save Erica’s life. Hernando and Erica prayed. Their church prayed. Family and hospital staff rebuked Erica for not ending the pregnancy.

Two days before the C-section, a 3-D ultrasound showed that nothing had changed. That night, Erica had a dream. She saw a baby boy playing in a basket and heard a voice telling her husband, “Take your son. He is a gift from God. You shall name him Samuel David. Raise him according to God’s Word.”

Erica and Hernando took the dream as a sign that the baby might survive. They bought baby supplies for the first time. The next day, however, they braced for the worst. The physician said that he would do the C-section, cut the umbilical cord, and expect the baby to die within minutes.

C-sections usually take 20 to 30 minutes. Hernando waited in the waiting room for 30 minutes . . . 40 minutes . . . 50 minutes. His anxiety grew as 60 minutes passed. Suddenly he heard screams. They weren’t his wife’s. They weren’t their baby’s. They were the sound of the physician and nurses screaming in surprise. They had expected a deformed baby but instead found a perfect baby boy.

“It is impossible!” the physician exclaimed. “This is a miracle!”

The parents determined to raise Samuel David according to God’s Word, and today they credit him for leading them and many others to Jesus. While seeking medical treatment for the boy’s subsequent kidney problems, they learned about and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Today, Hernando works as a physician at the Adventist Medical Center on the campus of Colombia Adventist University in Medellin, Colombia. Samuel is a healthy eight-year-old boy. “We decided to trust in God even though almost everyone was against us,” said Hernando, 60. “God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. Many people have come to the feet of Jesus after hearing Samuel’s story.”



*This quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at [AdventistMission.org](http://AdventistMission.org).*

**Study Focus:** *Matthew 28:20****Part I: Overview***

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God's covenants are timeless. Though Noah, Abraham, and Moses, and others have passed away, the fulfillment of God's promises still goes on. His promise of salvation is still extended to us if we choose to open our hearts to Him.

***Part II: Commentary***

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When Yahweh announced that He was Abram's *Shield* (*Gen. 15:1*), this meant that He would be Abram's Protector. The term *shield* pointed to Yahweh's protective guarantee to Abram. In spite of his idea that Eliezer would become the son of his inheritance, a special son would spring from Sarai's womb. This son would produce an *Abrahamic* bloodline, and they would be as myriad as "the stars."

**Thy Shield**

"After these things the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not fear, Abram; I am your shield, *your reward will increase greatly.*'"—Jay Green, ed., *The Interlinear Hebrew/Greek English Bible*, vol. 1, p. 32; emphasis supplied. (*See Gen. 15:1.*)

"The 'shield' or protection spoken of here does not refer to physical protection in war or physical protection from misfortune. Rather, it refers to protection from the possibility that the covenant promise would not be fulfilled through Abraham and his future seed. . . . If we are Abraham's seed (and all who have the faith of Abraham are Abraham's seed), then we also have the assurance that God will be our shield."—Gerhard M. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, p. 44.

**The Messianic Promise: Part 1**

Having been denied entrance to the Promised Land, Moses stood on the palatial mountaintop of his odyssey's end and was given a vision of the coming Messiah: "He was permitted to look down the stream of time and behold the first advent of our Saviour. . . . He beheld Christ's humble life in Nazareth, His ministry of love and sympathy and healing, His rejection by a proud, unbelieving nation. . . . He saw Jesus upon Olivet as with weeping He bade farewell to the city of His love. . . .

"He saw that . . . God had not cast off the seed of Abraham; the

glorious purposes which He had undertaken to accomplish through Israel were to be fulfilled. All who through Christ should become the children of faith were to be counted as Abraham's seed."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 475, 476.

### **The Messianic Promise: Part 2**

In Genesis 3:15, the preincarnate Christ predicted the Messianic advent, which was to provide atonement for the human race; to prove to sinless realms that there was no excuse for Adam's failure and to validate the immortal blending of the law and the gospel by means of Calvary.

The Adamic fall produced in humankind a new paradigm of evil. Adam's posterity became diseased with a natural mental proclivity to rebel against divine sovereignty. Hence, since sin cannot be mere wrongdoing, it should be described as a spiritual psychotic condition that rages against divine sovereignty. In Matthew 1:21, the promise was given of a coming Christ who would heal us from the disease of spiritual schizophrenia. Born outside of Christ, the human race is in a condition of spiritual psychopathology. Christ came that we might become healed through a "blood transfusion" on the basis of His death at Calvary.

Thus, Christ became the *Monogenes*, or *only begotten Son* (*John 3:16*), in that Christ entered the cosmos as the only One of His kind, without any competition. In Nazareth, the Second Adam started His humble ministry in a fallen, corrupt world, in contrast to the perfection of Paradise, wherein the original Adam failed. This God-man, who was tempted in all things, successfully evaded the hellhounds of sin. (*See Gen. 3:15; 1 Cor. 10:13; 15:21, 22; and Heb. 4:15, 16.*) Read Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 700.

### **"Make Your Name Great"**

In scorching contrast to those stellar, though presumptuous, empire builders on the plains of Shinar, Abraham avoided self-deification, even though God had promised to make his name great. "If Nimrod is the archetypal secular political leader of the post-Flood world, Abraham is its spiritual leader. Abraham is . . . Yahweh's instrument for the fulfillment of His vision for humanity. . . .

"With Abraham, world history takes a different tack; God establishes a new pattern. Abraham is the wave of the future for human beings and for all nations. Yahweh indicates here His indifference to bloodlines. . . .

"A new line of believers in the one God is begun. Abraham, an Afro-Asiatic who lived in Nimrod's area of influence, is chosen by Yahweh to be His servant for the blessing of his brothers through his seed. . . .



“One man now is to act on behalf of God and humanity. . . . The plan and inclusion in it are based, not on ethnicity, but on covenant relationship.”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, pp. 77–79.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Reflection:** A rabbinic tale of the Red Sea crossing goes like this: just as the sea began to drown the Egyptians, the angels in heaven began to clap and dance and celebrate. Then God’s sorrowful voice intervened, saying, “The work of My hand, My creation, has sunk in the sea!” God’s love is so great that He takes no pleasure in the destruction of even the most wicked.

1. **God’s love extends to everyone, even the person who breaks His law and His heart. How is this love manifested in the covenant relationship that He seeks to establish with every individual? How does this love continue to manifest itself when one rejects God’s offer? What is Satan’s defense when God exhibits such love?**

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2. **Because they were oppressed by a foreign power, the Jewish people wanted a messiah who would free them. Jesus, however, journeyed into this world to take up a cross, not to occupy a throne. How did His mission fit into God’s covenant offer to us?**

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3. God had many plans for Israel, but the people often failed Him. Do you suppose God wants to use us as He meant to use Israel? Explain. What must we do individually and as a church so that we may “hear” His voice and be His vessels?

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4. With the coming of the Messiah, the people expected signs and wonders, miracles and mysticism. In what ways are we like that today? How is it possible for us to miss the subtle signs of the Second Coming? As a corporate body, how can the church make positive strides toward being a prepared and waiting people?

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5. When you accept God’s salvation, you begin the journey of becoming more and more like Christ with every passing day. What barometer do you use to measure your progress? What do you think God uses to measure your progress? Charles Swindoll describes the struggle of one’s spiritual growth as three steps forward, one step backward. If such is the case, how does one press forward without getting discouraged? In Genesis 15:1, God tells Abram that He is his “exceeding great reward.” In what sense is God and our relationship with Him not just a means to an end but the end in itself?

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6. God tells Jacob in Genesis 28:14 that his blessing would lead to the entire world being blessed. Can a blessing really be a blessing if it is not somehow shared? Explain.

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7. God's original covenant with Abram seemed to suggest that He had Abram's lineal descendants in mind. But later on, it becomes clear that God had in mind diverse groups and individuals united by common faith. Did God change His mind? Discuss.

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8. The fact that God chose Abram, an obscure nomad, suggests that what God values in human beings is quite different from what we value about ourselves and others. What might God have seen in Abraham?

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# UNITED BY MISSION



Angie



Magdalena



Elina

A 17-year-old girl starts a prayer group at public school in Mexico. A 12-year-old girl gives Bible studies to a dentist in Trinidad and Tobago. A 10-year-old girl leads school bullies to baptism in Colombia. What do they have in common? They are united by mission in the Inter-America Division, which will receive this quarter's Thirteen Sabbath Offering.

Read more in the youth and adult Mission magazine ([bit.ly/adultmission](http://bit.ly/adultmission)) and the Children's Mission magazine ([bit.ly/childrensmision](http://bit.ly/childrensmision)).

Thank you for supporting Adventist Mission with your prayers and Sabbath School mission offerings.





*What is Total Member Involvement?*

- ▶ Total Member Involvement (TMI) is a full-scale, world-church evangelistic thrust that involves every member, every church, every administrative entity, every type of public outreach ministry, as well as personal and institutional outreach.
- ▶ It is a calendar-driven, intentional soul-winning plan that discovers the needs of families, friends, and neighbors. Then it shares how God fulfills every need, resulting in church planting and church growth, with a focus on retaining, preaching, sharing, and discipling.

**HOW TO IMPLEMENT TMI TIME IN SABBATH SCHOOL**

*Dedicate the first 15 minutes\* of each lesson to plan, pray and share:*

- ▶ **TMI IN-REACH:** Plan to visit, pray, care for missing or hurting members, and distribute territory assignments. Pray and discuss ways to minister to the needs of church families, inactive members, youth, women and men, and various ways to get the church family involved.
- ▶ **TMI OUT-REACH:** Pray and discuss ways of reaching your community, city, and world, fulfilling the Gospel Commission by sowing, reaping, and keeping. Involve all ministries in the church as you plan short-term and long-term soul-winning projects. TMI is about intentional acts of kindness. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved: 1. Develop the habit of finding needs in your community. 2. Make plans to address those needs. 3. Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ **TMI UP-REACH:** Lesson Study. Encourage members to engage in individual Bible study—make study of the Bible in Sabbath School participatory. Study for transformation, not information.

TMI	Time	Explanation
Fellowship Outreach World Mission	15 min.*	Pray, plan, organize for action. Care for missing members. Schedule outreach.
Lesson Study	45 min.*	Involve everyone in the study of the lesson. Ask questions. Highlight key texts.
Lunch		Plan lunch for the class after worship. <b>THEN GO OUT AND REACH SOMEONE!</b>

*\*Adjust times as necessary.*

# Abraham's Seed




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ezek. 16:8; Deut. 28:1, 15; Jer. 11:8; Gen. 6:5; John 10:27, 28; Gal. 3:26–29; Rom. 4:16, 17.*

**Memory Text:** “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

In a small town, the clock in the jeweler's window stopped one day at a quarter to nine. Many of the citizens had been depending on this clock to know the time. On this particular morning, business men and women glanced in the window and noticed it was only fifteen minutes to nine; children on their way to school were surprised to find they still had plenty of time to loiter. Many persons were late that morning because one small clock in the jeweler's window had stopped.”—C. L. Paddock, *God's Minutes* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1965), p. 244, adapted.

How accurate a representation of ancient Israel's failure! The Lord placed Israel “in the midst of the nations” (*Ezek. 5:5*)—in the strategic bridge-land between three continents (Africa, Europe, and Asia). They were to be the spiritual “clock” of the world.

Israel, however, stopped in a sense like the clock in the jeweler's window. Yet, it was not a total failure; for then, as today, God has His faithful remnant. Our study this week focuses on the identity and role of God's true Israel in every age, including our own.

**The Week at a Glance:** What covenant promises did the Lord make to Israel? What conditions came with them? How well did the nation abide by those promises? What happened when they disobeyed?

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 8.

## “Above All People . . .”

**“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut. 7:6).**

There is no question about it: the Lord specifically had chosen the Hebrew people to be His special representatives upon the earth. The word translated as “special” in the above verse, *segullah*, can mean “valued property” or “peculiar treasure.” The crucial point to remember, too, is that this choice was totally the act of God, an expression of His grace. There was nothing found in the people themselves that made them deserve this grace. There couldn’t be, because grace is something that comes undeserved.

**Read** Ezekiel 16:8. How does it help explain the Lord’s choosing of Israel?

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“Why was Israel chosen by Yahweh? That was inscrutable. She was a small group of people without great culture or prestige. She possessed no special personal qualities which would warrant such a choice. The election was the act of God alone. . . . The ultimate cause for that choice lay in the mystery of divine love. Yet the fact is that God *did* love Israel and *did* choose her, thereby honouring His promise to the fathers. . . . She had been chosen in virtue of Yahweh’s love for her. She had been liberated from slavery in Egypt by a display of Yahweh’s power. Let her once grasp these great facts and she would realize that she was indeed a holy and a specially treasured people. Any tendency on her part, therefore, to surrender such a noble status was reprehensible in the extreme.”—J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), pp. 130, 131.

According to the divine plan, the Israelites were to be both a royal and a priestly race. In an evil world they were to be kings, moral and spiritual, in that they were to prevail over the realm of sin. As priests, they were to draw near to the Lord in prayer, in praise, and in sacrifice. As intermediaries between God and the heathen, they were to serve as instructors, preachers, and prophets and were to be examples of holy living—Heaven’s exponents of true religion.

**Look at the phrase in the verse for today in which the Lord says that they were to be “above all people . . . of the earth.” Considering all that the Word has taught about the virtue of humility and the danger of pride, what do you think that verse means? In what ways were they to be “above” all the people? Should we apply that idea to ourselves, as a church, as well? If so, how?**

## Land Deal (Gen. 35:12)

The promise that a land would be given to God’s people, Israel, was first given to Abraham and then repeated to Isaac and Jacob. Joseph’s deathbed words repeated this promise (Gen. 50:24). God informed Abraham, however, that “four hundred years” would pass before the seed of Abraham would take possession of the land (Gen. 15:13, 16). Fulfillment of the promise began in the days of Moses and Joshua. Moses repeated the promise in the divine command: “ ‘Behold, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land’ ” (Deut. 1:8, RSV).

**Read Deuteronomy 28:1, 15. What is implied in these words? In short, the land would be given to Israel as part of the covenant. A covenant implies obligations. What obligations did Israel have?**

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The first part of Deuteronomy 28 outlines the blessings Israel would receive if they followed God’s will. The other section of the chapter deals with the curses that would befall them if they did not. These curses were “largely, though not wholly, brought about by simply giving sin scope to work out its own evil results. . . . ‘He that soweth [his] flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption’ (Gal. [6]:8). Like water, which, left to itself, will not cease running till it has found its level; like a clock, which, left to itself, will not cease going till it has run itself completely down; like a tree, which, left to grow, cannot but bring forth its appropriate fruit—so sin has a level to seek, a course to run, a fruit to mature, and ‘the end of those things is death’ (Rom. [6]:21).”—*The Pulpit Commentary: Deuteronomy*, ed., H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), vol. 3, p. 439.

Despite all the promises of land, those promises were not unconditional. They came as part of a covenant. Israel had to fulfill her end of the bargain; if not, the promises could be nullified. The Lord made it very clear, more than once, that if they disobeyed, the land would be taken from them. Read Leviticus 26:27–33. It’s hard to imagine how the Lord could have been more explicit with His words.

**As Christians, we look forward to receiving and keeping the Promised Lands of heaven and the earth made new. They have been promised to us, just as the earthly Promised Land was to the Hebrews. The difference, however, is that once we get there, there is no chance of our ever losing it (Dan. 7:18). At the same time, there are conditions for getting there. How do you understand what these conditions are, especially in the context of salvation by faith alone?**



## Israel and the Covenant

**“Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart: therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do: but they did them not” (Jer. 11:8).**

Look at the above text. The Lord says that He will bring upon them “all the words of this covenant.” *Yet, He is talking about something bad!* Though we tend to think of the covenant as offering us only something good, there’s the flip side. This principle was seen with Noah. God offered Noah something wonderful—preservation from destruction—but Noah had to obey in order to receive the blessings of God’s grace. If he did not, the other side of the covenant would follow.

**Compare** the above text with Genesis 6:5 regarding the pre-Flood world. What’s the parallel? What do these verses say about how important it is for us to control our thoughts?

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Unfortunately, for the most part, the history of national Israel was a repeated pattern of apostasy followed by divine judgments, repentance, and a period of obedience. Only briefly, under David and Solomon, did Israel control the full extent of the promised territory.

Look at these texts from Jeremiah regarding Israel’s apostasy. “They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man’s, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD. . . . Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD” (Jer. 3:1, 20).

This brings up something touched upon earlier: The covenant God wants with us is not merely some cold legal agreement made between businesspeople looking to cut the best deal for themselves. The covenant relationship is a commitment, one as serious and sacred as marriage, which is why the Lord uses the imagery that He does.

The point is that Israel’s apostasy did not have its root in disobedience but in a broken personal relationship with the Lord, a break that resulted in disobedience that finally brought punishment upon them.

**Why is the personal, relational aspect so crucial in the Christian life? Why, if our relationship with God isn’t right, are we so prone to fall into sin and disobedience? Also, what would you say to someone who asked this question: “How can I develop a deep, loving relationship with God?”**

## The Remnant

**Despite** Israel’s repeated cycle of apostasy, divine judgments, and repentance, what hope is found in these texts?

*Isa. 4:3* \_\_\_\_\_

*Mic. 4:6, 7* \_\_\_\_\_

*Zeph. 3:12, 13* \_\_\_\_\_

Although God’s plan for ancient Israel was spoiled by disobedience, it was never completely frustrated. Among the weeds, a few flowers still grew. Many of the Old Testament prophets speak of this faithful remnant, whom God would gather unto Himself as a lovely bouquet.

The purpose of God in creating and preserving a faithful remnant was the same as it had been for all of Israel—to use them as His divinely appointed instruments for declaring “ ‘my glory among the nations’ ” (*Isa. 66:19, RSV*). By this means, others would join the faithful to “worship the King, the LORD of hosts” (*Zech. 14:16, RSV*).

Thus, no matter how bad the situation became, God always had some faithful people who, despite apostasy within the ranks of God’s chosen people, kept their own calling and election sure (*2 Pet. 1:10*). In short, whatever the failings of the nation as a whole, there were still those who tried to keep, as best they could, their end of the covenant (*see, for instance, 1 Kings 19:14–18*). And though, perhaps, they suffered with their nation as a whole (such as when exiled from the land), the final and ultimate covenant promise will be theirs—that of eternal life.

**Read** John 10:27, 28. What is Jesus saying there? Apply His words, and the promises in them, to the situation regarding apostasy in ancient Israel. How do these words help explain the existence of a faithful remnant?

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A few years ago, a young woman gave up her Christian faith entirely, mostly because she was discouraged by the sin, apostasy, and hypocrisy she saw in her local church. “Those people weren’t really Christians,” she said, using that as an excuse to give up everything. Why is her excuse not valid? Base your answer on the principles of today’s study.

## Spiritual Israel

Whatever the mistakes and failings of ancient Israel, the Lord was not finished with the plan of creating a faithful people to serve Him. In fact, the Old Testament looked forward to a time when the Lord would create a spiritual Israel, a faithful body of believers, Jews and Gentiles, who would carry on the work of preaching the gospel to the world. Welcome to the early church!

### **Read Galatians 3:26–29.**

**1. What promise is Paul talking about in Gal. 3:29?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. What is the key element that makes a person an heir to these promises? (See Gal. 3:26.)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. Why is Paul breaking down distinctions of gender, nationality, and social status?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**4. What does it mean to be “one in Christ”?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. Read Romans 4:16, 17. How do these verses help us understand what Paul is saying in Galatians 3:26–29?** \_\_\_\_\_

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As a son of Abraham, Christ became, in a special sense, heir to the covenant promises. By baptism we acquire kinship to Christ and through Him acquire the right to participate in the promises made to Abraham. Thus, all that God promised Abraham is found in Christ, and the promises become ours, not because of nationality, race, or gender, but through grace, which God bestows upon us through faith.

“The gift to Abraham and his seed included not merely the land of Canaan, but the whole earth. So says the apostle, ‘The promise, that he should be the *heir of the world*, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.’ Romans 4:13. And the Bible plainly teaches that the promises made to Abraham are to be fulfilled through Christ. . . . [Believers become] heirs to ‘an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away’ [1 Peter 1:4]—the earth freed from the curse of sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 170. This promise will be fulfilled literally when the saints live on the new earth forever and ever with Christ (*Dan. 7:27*).

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Vineyard of the Lord,” pp. 15–22; “Hope for the Heathen,” pp. 367–378; and “The House of Israel,” pp. 703–721, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan’s influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 369, 370.

Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10 to discover the four titles Peter applies to the church. Most of these titles are reflected in the following Old Testament texts that refer to Israel: Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 43:20. What does each of these titles emphasize about the church’s relationship to God? (For example, the title “chosen nation” emphasizes the fact that God chose the church and has a specific destiny for it.)

### Discussion Questions:

- ① In ancient Israel, the priests made animal sacrifices that pointed to the Messiah. As members of a royal priesthood, what types of “sacrifices” are church members to make? (See 1 Pet. 2:5.)
- ② God separated Israel from the world so it could be a holy nation. It also was to share salvation truths with the world. The same is true for the church today. How is it possible to be separate from the world while at the same time to be in a position to share the gospel with the world? How do Israel’s experience and Jesus’ example help us to answer this question?
- ③ God always maintained a remnant within ancient Israel. Consider Elijah and the remnant that existed during his time (1 Kings 19; note especially verse 18). Why is it often easier to be true to God in the midst of worldly people than in the midst of backsliding members of one’s own church family?

**Summary:** God’s true Israel (whether before or after the Cross) is the Israel of faith, persons who live in a spiritual, covenant relationship with Him. Such people function as His representatives, holding out to the world the gospel of His saving grace.

## Every Step of the Way

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Dr. Hernando Díaz was desperate. He hadn't worked as a physician for two years because of his two-year-old son's illness. He needed a house and a job.

Hernando moved his family from their hometown in northern Colombia to Medellin, the country's second-largest city, in hopes of finding a hospital to treat Samuel's kidney problems. But after living in the hospital for a year, he needed a house for Samuel; his wife, Erica; and their 11-year-old son, Immer. Nothing seemed affordable near the hospital. He prayed and found a house whose owner rented rooms to students. He asked for a room.

"I only have one empty room, and a student has paid for it," the owner said.

"Look," Hernando said. "God brought me here because I need that room."

The owner gave him the room rent-free for six months.

With that kind gesture, Hernando was certain that God was leading him.

Immer had lived with relatives in another city for a year, and Hernando wanted to enroll him in a Christian school near the hospital. A hospital receptionist heard about his quest. "I know a good Christian school nearby," she said. "My niece studied there. It's Seventh-day Adventist."

Hernando wasn't familiar with the Adventist Church. But a visit to the school impressed him, and Immer started classes. Shortly into the school year, Immer informed the teacher that his father was a physician. "Tell him to give me his résumé so I can submit it to the Adventist clinic," the teacher said.

She knew that the Adventist Medical Center on the campus of Colombia Adventist University was struggling to find a physician.

Immer told his father, and Hernando gave his résumé to the teacher.

"I want to work, but I can't because I need to be with my baby," he said.

"Don't worry," the teacher said. "Just show up for the interview."

When the clinic called him for an interview, Hernando explained his need for a flexible schedule. He was hired on the spot. "We'll work with your schedule," the director said, adding that he could help with Samuel's paperwork.

A grateful Hernando joined the clinic's team. He became acquainted with the Adventist faith and accepted an invitation to attend church. His understanding of God's love grew. "The Adventists were hospitable, humble, and sincerely interested in helping me," he said. "I brought my family to church."



Hernando and his family were baptized into the Adventist Church. Today, Samuel is a healthy eight-year-old boy, and Hernando works full-time at the Adventist Medical Center, where he has led more than 100 patients and others to Christ through his personal testimony.

Hernando believes that God led him every step of the way. "Other hospitals wouldn't work with me," he said. "It was a miracle that the Adventist clinic hired me."

**Study Focus:** *1 Peter 2:9****Part I: Overview***

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Even though Israel was God’s chosen nation and had inherited the covenant of its forefathers, it did not exhibit the same strength of conviction as its predecessors often did. Consequently, many in Israel made the same mistakes as their forefathers, dismissing the importance of God’s covenant in their own lives. God was faced again with sifting out the remnant from His sinful children.

***Part II: Commentary***

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**Above All People**

In Deuteronomy 28, as well as in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and several minor prophets, covenantal promises were made to Israel on the basis of its loyalty to Yahweh.

However, the death of Jesus, the Messiah Prince, foretold in Daniel 9:25–27, led to the spreading, eventually, of the new covenant to both Jews and Gentiles alike. Anyone, now, by faith in Jesus, could claim the covenant promises as their own. Though many in Israel were unfaithful to God, God remained faithful to His people.

**Land Deal**

“The Old Testament describes the land promised to the patriarchs and Israel consistently in theological terms: as God’s gracious gift or blessing to His covenant people (Genesis 12:1, 7; 13:14–17; 15:18–21; Deuteronomy 1:5–8; Psalm 44:1–3). . . . Consequently, ‘Israel cannot claim an immediate relation to its land, cannot have it at its disposal in an autonomous way, cannot idolize the land into an absolute possession.’ Israel does not own the land. . . .

“Although the land was the gift of grace to Israel, the covenant people could only abide or stay within the land of God if they would obey the Lord (see Deuteronomy 4:40, Isaiah 1:19). The gift cannot be received without its Giver.”—Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), p. 136.

**Israel and the Covenant**

A salient spiritual undertone of the covenant of grace was obey and live; disobey and die. For ancient Israel, this thematic motif had been woven through the tapestry of the Old Testament, and later it also would appear in the New Testament. From the Adamic covenant to the new covenant,

the divine functionality of Yahweh's ordained and decreed will had been linked to each divine promise.

Israel's national greatness and land-extension promises rested on conditional aspects of the covenant. To be sure, those national promises that applied to Israel's future and its international prominence had been linked to its obedience. On one hand, regardless of human choice, God's decreed will hinges on the unshakable fulfillment of a divine promise (see *Gen. 3:15*). On the other hand, God does seem to allow for human choices to disrupt the intent of a divine promise, thus releasing a chain of bitter consequences (see *Gen. 2:16, 17*).

### The Remnant

"Whenever the Old Testament prophets portray the eschatological remnant of Israel, it is always characterized as a faithful, religious community which worships God with a new heart on the basis of the 'new covenant' (Joel 2:32; Zephaniah 3:12, 13; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 11:16–21)."—Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*, p. 90.

### Covenant Israel

"This faithful remnant of the end-time will become God's witness among all the nations and includes also non-Israelites, regardless of their ethnic origin (Zechariah 9:7; 14:16; Isaiah 66:19; Daniel 7:27; 12:1–3).

"The total picture of the Old Testament eschatological remnant reveals that Israel's covenant blessings as a whole will be fulfilled, not in unbelieving national Israel, but only in that Israel which is faithful to Yahweh and trusts in His Messiah. This remnant of Israel will incorporate the faithful remnants of all [G]entile nations and thus fulfill the divine purpose of Israel's election."—Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*, pp. 90, 91.

The crucial point is that God has not rejected, en masse, anyone. All, Jew or Gentile (though to the Jew first), can find salvation in Jesus. The idea that God has rejected all individual Jews because they are Jews is totally antithetical to Scripture. As Paul wrote: "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?" (*Rom. 3:1–3, NKJV*).

Notice, only *some* didn't believe, but many did. And these people, these believing Jews, along with the Gentiles, formed the early church. In fact, the church was at first pretty much only believing Jews!

God has rejected no one en masse, as a group, because salvation never comes en masse. Jew, Gentile, people are lost or saved only as individuals and based on their own choices.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Reflection:** Society always has been conscious of pedigree. An impressive pedigree gains favor, influence, and connection. Even in Bible times, people were often identified by their pedigree. To be one of Abraham’s “seed” was a matter of great pride and prestige for the Jews.

- 1. What role did the covenant play in establishing relationships between God and humanity during a time when pedigree was an important issue? What does our connection with God have to do with our connection with other people? What lessons can we learn from Israel’s covenant relationship with Jehovah that can strengthen our relationship with Him?**

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- 2. To defuse common prejudices of His time, Jesus pointed to some obvious truths, such as the sun shining on both the evil and the good (*see Matt. 5:45*). The fact that He had to remind God’s chosen people of the obvious tells us how self-centered they were. What are the dangers of our church becoming self-centered?**

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3. Part of Israel’s pedigree was the “shekinah,” the visible, divine, and splendid glory of God (*Exod. 40:34–38*). What tangible evidence do you have of God? Do we really need a visible reminder of Him? Explain. What can be even more powerful? What other elements of your life tell of God’s abiding presence?

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4. Review 2 Corinthians 11:16–33. Paul’s opponents in Corinth were Christian Jews who had joined the church and were seeking leadership positions. They believed that because they were Abraham’s seed, they were superior to Gentile Christians. Paul, however, recognized no such distinction between Jew and Gentile concerning their salvation and standing before the Lord. How might we feel superior to others who have just as much right to a covenant relationship with God as we have? How can the “external” expectations we have of others hinder the church’s ultimate mission?

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5. Both the Old and New Testaments often refer to God's people as His bride (*see Isa. 62:5; all of Hosea*). Breaking the marriage vows, then, symbolizes disobeying God. When the marriage vows are broken, hearts are broken too. Applying this imagery to your life, how do you see yourself strengthening the bond between the church and Christ? Does the bride, being the church, relieve the individual church member of responsibility? Explain.

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6. How does the new covenant help us to be a "better" bride than Israel was? Does our lack of pedigree help or hinder our spiritual growth as Christ's bride? Explain.

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# Covenant *at* Sinai



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Deut. 1:29–31; Hos. 11:1; Rev. 5:9; Deut. 29:10–13; Exod. 19:5, 6; Rom. 6:1, 2; Rev. 14:12; Rom. 10:3.*

**Memory Text:** “‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself’ ” (*Exodus 19:4, RSV*).

A little boy, one of seven children, met with an accident and was taken to the hospital. In his home there was seldom enough of anything. He never had more than just a part of a glass of milk. If the glass was full, it was shared by two of the children, and whoever drank first had to be careful not to drink too far. After the little fellow was made comfortable in the hospital, the nurse brought him a large glass of milk. He looked at it longingly for a moment and then, with the memory of privations at home, asked, ‘How deep shall I drink?’ The nurse, with her eyes shining and a lump in her throat, said, ‘Drink it all, child, drink it all!’—H.M.S. Richards, “Free Grace,” *Voice of Prophecy News*, June 1950, p. 4.

Like this boy, it was the privilege of ancient Israel, as it is our own, to drink deeply from the wells of salvation. Israel’s deliverance from centuries of slavery and oppression was a marvelous exhibition of divine grace. Likewise, divine grace is involved in our own emancipation from sin.

**The Week at a Glance:** What imagery did the Lord use to describe His relationship with Israel? In what ways do the stories of the Exodus and Sinai parallel personal salvation? What was the role of the law in the Sinai covenant?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 15.

## On Eagles' Wings

As a people, Israel had been immersed in Egyptian paganism for many long, hard centuries, an experience that no doubt dimmed their knowledge of God, His will, and His goodness.

How could the Lord win them back to Himself?

For starters, He would demonstrate the genuineness of His love for Israel, and He did this through His mighty acts of deliverance. He would begin to woo the nation into a loving response to His covenant proposal. At Sinai, God first reminded the nation of His gracious acts in their behalf.

**What** two illustrations describe the manner in which the Lord brought Israel from Egypt to Sinai?

*Exod. 19:4, Deut. 32:10–12* \_\_\_\_\_

*Deut. 1:29–31, Hos. 11:1* \_\_\_\_\_

**What** would these illustrations teach Israel (and us) about the nature of God's attitude toward His people?

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These illustrations indicate that our God is very much aware of our helplessness. Read Psalm 103:13, 14. In both the figures of the eagle and the parent carrying his child we sense God's concern for our well-being. Tender, supportive, protective, encouraging, He desires to bring us to full maturity.

“The eagle was known for its unusual devotions to its young. It too lived on mountain tops. In teaching its young to fly it carried them upon its back to those great heights that overlook the plains of Sinai, then it dropped them down into the depths. If the baby was still too young and too bewildered to fly, father-eagle would swoop down beneath it, catch it on his back, and fly up again with it to the eyrie on the crags above. And that, says the divine voice, is ‘how I brought you out of Egypt to myself.’ ”—George A. F. Knight, *Theology of Narration* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), p. 128.

**Contrast** God's interest in us with our interest in one another. How should His concern for us affect our concern for others?

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**Based on your personal experience, what illustrations can you think of to describe God's unselfish interest in us? Make up a few images on your own, from your own experiences; draw also from whatever culture you live in. Share them with the class.**

## The Pattern of Salvation

“Say therefore to the people of Israel, “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” ’ ” (Exod. 6:6, 7, RSV).

**Look** at the above verses: What principle do we see in them, as before, regarding the role of God toward humanity in the covenant relationship? (Focus on how often the word *I* appears in those verses.)

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The deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery and the deliverance of Noah and his family from the Flood are the two prominent salvific events in the writings of Moses. Both provide insights into the science of salvation. But it is the Exodus event in particular that provides the basic pattern.

When God says to Israel (through Moses), “I will *redeem* you” (Exod. 6:6, *emphasis supplied*), He literally says, “I will act as the *kinsman redeemer*,” or *go’el*.

“The word *redeem* in verse 6 [of Exodus 6] refers to a member of a family buying back or ransoming another member of the family, especially when that member was in slavery for debt or about to go into slavery. Israel apparently had no earthly relative to redeem her, but God was now Israel’s relative, her kinsman redeemer.”—Bernard L. Ramm, *His Way Out* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books Division, G/L Publications, 1974), p. 50.

**How** do you understand the idea of God’s “ransoming,” or buying back, His people from slavery? What was the price that had to be paid? What does that tell us about our worth? (See Mark 10:45, 1 Tim. 2:6, and Rev. 5:9.)

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In Exodus 3:8 God says that He has “come down” to rescue Israel. This is a common Hebrew verb for God’s interaction with humanity. God is in heaven, and we are on earth, and only as God “comes down” to earth can He redeem us. In the truest sense of the idea, only when Jesus came down, lived, suffered, died, and was resurrected for us could we be redeemed. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14, RSV) is another way of saying that God *came down* in order to save us.

## The Sinai Covenant

The book of Exodus draws the reader's attention to three major events. Like three mountains, the Exodus itself, the establishment of the covenant, and the building of the tabernacle sanctuary rise above the foothills of lesser happenings. The establishment of the covenant, recorded in Exodus 19 through 24, was the Mount Everest of the three. A brief outline of Exodus 19 through 24 shows the sequence and the relationship of events.

Even if you do not have the time to look up all the verses listed below, focus on the sequence of events:

1. Israel's arrival and encampment at Sinai after being delivered by the Lord (*Exod. 19:1, 2*)
2. God's proposal of a covenant with Israel (*Exod. 19:3–6*)
3. Israel's response in acceptance of the covenant (*Exod. 19:7, 8*)
4. Preparations for formally receiving the covenant (*Exod. 19:9–25*)
5. Proclamation of the Ten Commandments (*Exod. 20:1–17*)
6. Moses as covenant mediator (*Exod. 20:18–21*)
7. Covenant principles spelled out (*Exod. 20:22–23:22*)
8. Ratification of the covenant (*Exod. 24:1–18*)

This covenant plays a vital role in the plan of salvation. It is the fourth covenant listed in the Bible (preceded by the ones with Adam, Noah, and Abraham), and in it God reveals Himself more fully than before, particularly as the entire sanctuary ritual is established. Thus, the sanctuary becomes the means by which He shows the people the plan of salvation that they were to reveal to the world.

Though the Lord had redeemed Israel from the bondage of Egypt, He wanted them to understand that redemption had a greater, more significant meaning than merely freedom from physical bondage. He wanted to redeem them from sin, the ultimate slavery, and this could happen only through the sacrifice of the Messiah, as taught in the types and symbols of the sanctuary service. It is no wonder, then, that not long after they were redeemed from bondage and given the law, the Israelites were instructed to build the sanctuary and establish its services, for in these things God revealed to them the plan of redemption—which is the true meaning and purpose of the covenant. For the covenant is nothing if not a covenant of salvation that the Lord offers to fallen humanity. That is what it was in Eden, and that is what it was at Sinai.

**Why was a covenant between God and the people of Israel a necessity?** (*See Deut. 29:10–13; notice, again, the relational aspect of the covenant.*)

## God and Israel

**“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel”** (*Exod. 19:5, 6*).

In these verses the Lord was proposing His covenant with the children of Israel. Though in one sense the Lord had called them, that calling was not automatically bestowed upon them without their choice. They had to cooperate. Even their deliverance from Egypt involved their cooperation: if they had not done what the Lord had said (such as putting the blood on the doorposts), they would not have been delivered. It was that simple.

Here, too, the Lord does not say to them, “Whether you like it or don’t like it, you will be a peculiar treasure unto Me and a nation of priests.” That is not how it works, and that is not what the text says.

**Read Exodus 19:5, 6, quoted above. How do you understand what the Lord is saying in the context of salvation by faith? Does the command included there to obey the Lord somehow nullify the concept of salvation by grace? How do the following texts help you to understand the answer? Rom. 3:19–24; Rom. 6:1, 2; Rom. 7:7; Rev. 14:12.**

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“We do not earn salvation by our obedience; for salvation is the free gift of God, to be received by faith. But obedience is the fruit of faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 61.

Think of what the Lord was willing to do for the nation of Israel: not only did He miraculously deliver them from Egyptian bondage, but He also wanted to make them His own treasured possession, a nation of priests. Basing their relationship with Him upon His salvation (both temporal, as from Egyptian slavery, and eternal), the Lord sought to elevate them to a spiritual, intellectual, and moral level that would make them the wonder of the ancient world, all for the purpose of using them to preach the gospel to the nations. All they had to do, in response, was obey.

**In what ways should our personal, one-on-one experience with the Lord reflect that same principle we see here in today’s study?**

**Promises, Promises . . .** (*Exod. 19:8*)

At first sight, all seems well. The Lord delivers His people, offers them the covenant promises, and they agree: they will do *all* that the Lord asks them to do. It is a deal “made in heaven,” right?

**Read** the following texts. What insight do they give us regarding Israel’s response to the covenant?

*Rom. 9:31, 32* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rom. 10:3* \_\_\_\_\_

*Heb. 4:1, 2* \_\_\_\_\_

Whatever God asks us to do, our relationship with Him must be founded upon faith. Faith provides the basis upon which works follow. Works, in and of themselves, no matter how purely motivated, no matter how sincere, no matter how numerous, can’t make us acceptable in the sight of a holy God. They could not do it either in Israel’s time, and they cannot in our time, as well.

**If, however,** the Bible again and again stresses works, why can’t works make us acceptable in God’s sight? (*See Isa. 53:6; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:23.*)

Unfortunately, the Hebrew people believed that their obedience became the means of their salvation, not the result of salvation. They sought righteousness in their obedience to the law, not the *righteousness of God*, which comes by faith. The Sinai covenant—though coming with a much more detailed set of instructions and law—was designed a covenant of grace as much as all the preceding covenants, as well. This grace, freely bestowed, brings about a change of heart that leads to obedience. The problem, of course, was not their attempt to obey (the covenant demanded that they obey); the problem was the kind of “obedience” they rendered, which wasn’t really obedience at all, as the subsequent history of the nation showed.

**Read carefully Romans 10:3, particularly the last part. What point is Paul making there? What happens to people who seek to establish their own righteousness? Why does that attempt inevitably lead to sin, unrighteousness, and rebellion? Look at our own lives. Are we not in danger of doing the same thing?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Exodus,” pp. 281–290; “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pp. 291–302; “The Law Given to Israel,” pp. 303–314, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The spirit of bondage is engendered by seeking to live in accordance with legal religion, through striving to fulfill the claims of the law in our own strength. There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus. The gospel preached to Abraham, through which he had hope, was the same gospel that is preached to us today, through which we have hope. Abraham looked unto Jesus, who is also the Author and the Finisher of our faith.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1077.

“During the bondage in Egypt many of the Israelites had, to a great extent, lost the knowledge of God’s law, and had mingled its precepts with heathen customs and traditions. God brought them to Sinai, and there with His own voice declared His law.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 334.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In what ways was the covenant relationship designed to maintain Israel’s physical and spiritual freedoms? (See *Lev. 26:3–13*; compare *Deut. 28:1–15*.)
- ❷ Read again Exodus 19:5, 6. Notice that the Lord makes this statement: “All the earth is mine.” Why would He say that, particularly in this context, one of seeking to establish a covenant with these people? How does our understanding of the Sabbath, and what it means, fit in here?
- ❸ We understand that we are forgiven our sins only through God’s grace. How do we understand the role of God’s grace in enabling us to live a life of faith and obedience?

**Summary:** The covenant God formed with Israel at Sinai was a covenant of grace. Having given abundant evidence of His gracious love and care by an extraordinary deliverance from Egyptian slavery, God invited the nation into a covenant with Him that would maintain and promote their freedoms. Although Israel responded in the affirmative, they lacked a true faith motivated by love. Their later history indicates that, for the most part, they failed to understand the true nature of the covenant and corrupted it into a salvation-by-works system. We need not follow Israel’s failure and ignore the marvelous grace that has been extended to sinners.

## “Let’s Go to Church!”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Something curious happened once Dr. Hernando Díaz began working at the Seventh-day Adventist clinic on the campus of Colombia Adventist University in Medellín, Colombia. He couldn’t stop praising God.

Hernando had long been a Christian, but he had never loved God so much. When no one would hire him as a physician, the Adventist Medical Center offered him a flexible schedule that allowed him to spend as much time as he needed with his critically ill two-year-old son, Samuel.

His love for God overflowed. He prayed with every patient who consented. He told everyone who would listen that God had miraculously saved his son’s life and marvelously provided him with the job at the clinic. He invited people to the university church, where he and his family regularly worshiped on Sabbath, even though they weren’t Adventists.

One Sabbath after his baptism, Hernando stopped at a red light as he was driving the family to church. A street vendor approached the car holding packs of chewing gum for sale. The sight was typical in Medellín, but Hernando had an unusual response. When he rolled down the window, the street vendor eagerly came up to him, hoping to make a sale. Hernando didn’t mention the chewing gum at all. “Let’s go to church!” he said.

The street vendor didn’t hesitate. “Let’s go!” he said.

Hernando could tell from the street vendor’s accent that he was from Venezuela. Thousands of Venezuelans have crossed the border into neighboring Colombia to look for work amid an economic crisis at home.

Hernando shared his personal testimony with the street vendor as they traveled to the university church.

The next Sabbath, the Venezuelan man returned to church with his own family. He and his family never missed a Sabbath. He now cooks and sells food on the street outside the Adventist Medical Center, using a food cart donated by church members. He and his family are taking baptismal classes. Hernando is praying that the family will give their hearts to Jesus, joining the six other people who have been baptized through his efforts.

Hernando said it isn’t difficult to lead people to Jesus. He follows the instructions that Jesus gave to the formerly demon-possessed man: “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you” (*Mark 5:19, NKJV*).



“I haven’t stopped glorifying God with my personal testimony,” Hernando said. “It has touched many hearts.”

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*This quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a missionary training center at Colombia Adventist University.*

**Study Focus:** *Exodus 19:4, RSV*

## ***Part I: Overview***

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After having lived among the Egyptians, whose religion taught that salvation was purchased by the works of human hands, Israel lost sight of who God truly was. They believed that their obedience to God was their salvation and that redemption arose from their own merit, not in their personal relationship with God.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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“When an eagle wants to teach its little ones to fly . . . , it prods one of the little eaglets and with its beak, noses it out of the nest. The eaglet starts to fall, and the great eagle flies underneath, puts its wing out, catches the little one on its back and flies a mile into the air.

“When you can hardly see the eagle as a point in the sky, it turns sideways, and down falls the little eaglet, which goes fluttering maybe a thousand feet.

“Meanwhile, the eagle circles around the eaglet and underneath it, the eagle catches the eaglet on its wings and carries the eaglet up in the air again. After dishing the eaglet out again and letting it go, the eaglet comes down farther and farther—sometimes within a hundred feet of the ground.

“Again the great eagle catches the little one on its back and up they go another mile. Little by little the eaglet will learn how to fly. The eagle knows when the eaglet is tired; it spoons the eaglet into the nest, noses out the next one and starts off again.”—Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations* (Dallas, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1998), pp. 3050, 3051.

### **On Eagles’ Wings**

With His sharp talons of grace, the Mountain Eagle of eternity prodded the Hebrew eaglet from the haughty nest of Egyptian oppression. At the Red Sea, the eaglet plummeted into panic when it heard the desert floor thunder with the ensuing chariot wheels of injustice. As the eaglet’s faith fluttered, it beheld two massive, gaping water walls that rose in glorious attention, saluting the majestic Eagle’s omnipotence. Between the lucid water walls, a dry highway had been carved out in supernatural fashion, pointing the trembling eaglet to safe passage.

### **The Pattern of Salvation**

Just as the Hebrew expression *go’el* in Exodus 6:6 revealed Christ as

Israel's *Redeemer-Kinsman*, there are four Greek New Testament terms that expand upon how Christ is our *Redeemer-Kinsman*: "There are four different words used to denote 'redemption' in the Greek New Testament: *agoridzo*, *exagoridzo*, *lutroo*, and *apolutrosis*. . . .

"The first word for 'redemption' [*agoridzo*] tells us that Jesus Christ came to earth to *locate us* in our depravity and to personally inspect our slavery to Satan.

"The second word for 'redemption' (*exagoridzo*) declares that Jesus came not only to inspect our condition but to permanently *remove us* from Satan's power.

"The third word for 'redemption' (*lutroo*) tells us that Jesus was so dedicated to delivering us from Satan's dominion that He was willing to *pay the ransom price* of His own blood. . . .

"The fourth word for 'redemption' (*apolutrosis*) tells us that, in addition to permanently setting us free from Satan's hold, Jesus *restored us* to the position of 'sons of God.' Now we are fully restored and made joint-heirs with Jesus Christ Himself (Romans 8:17)." —Rick Renner, *Dressed to Kill: A Biblical Approach to Spiritual Warfare and Armor* (Tulsa, OK: Teach All Nations, 2007), pp. 81, 98, 99. (*Study 1 Cor. 6:20; Gal. 3:13; Gal. 4:4, 5; Eph. 1:7; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19; Rev. 5:9; and Rev. 7:14.*)

### The Sinai Covenant

In the Sinai covenant (*see Exod. 19:5, 6*), there were three pivotal elements, or points, that Yahweh revealed as He addressed ancient Israel relative to His ordained will for them. The first element of this covenant was God's expressed desire to make the Hebrew nation a treasured possession. "In contrast to other types of possessions, namely, those that could not be moved, such as real estate, Israel became, through God's love and affection, His moveable treasure." —Gerhard M. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, p. 65.

The second point in this covenant was that Yahweh designed to make Israel a kingdom of priests. In other words: "Each Israelite, in one way or another, was to function as God's priestly agent to bring blessings to the nations of the entire world and to minister to their needs." —Gerhard M. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, p. 66. The third point in this covenant focused on Yahweh's design for Israel to be made a sanctified nation. In essence, the Israel of the covenant of grace was to become a sacred entity. Having already known that ancient Israel would soon break its covenant agreement (*see Exod. 19:7, 8*), Yahweh initiated the Sinai covenant. Why? (*Study Exodus 32.*)

### God and Israel

"And now if you will surely listen to My voice, and will keep My covenant, you shall become a special treasure to Me above the nations, for all the earth is Mine. And you shall become a kingdom of priests for Me,

a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”—*The Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 192. (See *Exodus 19:5, 6*.) “The Gospel is the Law unfolded, nothing more nor less. . . . The Law points to Christ; Christ points to the Law. The Gospel calls men to repentance. Repentance of what?—Of sin. And what is sin?—It is the transgression of the Law. Therefore the Gospel calls men . . . back to obedience to the Law of God.”—Ellen G. White, “The Law and the Gospel,” *The Signs of the Times*, Feb. 25, 1897.

### Promises, Promises . . .

“Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 20.

Here is another way to express this truth: it is not faith and works; it is not faith or works. It is a faith that works. We reveal our faith by our works; in fact, works can and do strengthen faith.

## *Part III: Life Application*

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**For Reflection:** During the last week of 1999, salon.com ran a story titled “The Hall of Shame.” It was about the ten most dishonorable sports figures of that year. The list included offenders ranging from someone who was arrested for murder to another person who had been caught with drugs. These were men who had entered into a contract with their teams and fans. They began their careers with the best of intentions: to play well, live honorably, and prove worthy of the signatures on their contracts.

Before one enters into a contract with anyone, it is important to know that person’s character. What is it about God’s character that makes us feel comfortable about entering into a covenant relationship with Him? Do you think He first looks at our characters before entering into relationships with us? Explain.

- 1. In most partnerships, the benefits to both parties are equal. However, when a holy God enters into a partnership with a sinful human, the relationship begins terribly imbalanced—God brings so much more to the partnership than we ever could. How is it possible to be subject to Him yet have the privilege of being in a partnership with Him? Explain.**

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2. Before you sign a contract, you should read all the demands and the fine print. But when God makes a covenant, He is very clear. There is no fine print or reading between the lines. His words are a series of definitives: “I will, I will, I will . . .” (for example, see *Exod. 6:6, 7*). In response, what will you bring into the partnership? If you were in God’s shoes, how comfortable would you be about entering a partnership with someone like you?

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3. Contracts are customized to suit the parties concerned, the type of businesses involved, et cetera. In what ways has God customized His covenant with you? How do you show appreciation for the “allowances” He has made in the event you break your contract? How does God’s role as your Friend affect His role as your Partner? Is there a conflict between the two roles? Explain. God recognizes our frailty (see *Ps. 103:13, 14*). Does this mean that God excuses sin(s)? We know that God forgives sin(s). How is this different?

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4. The idea of God coming down to our human level is most obvious in the New Testament, and people often assume that God was remote and unapproachable in the Old Testament. Why is this conception inaccurate?

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5. Many of the instructions given to Israel after the Exodus may seem irrelevant and outmoded to the modern person, and it is clear that at least some of them do not directly apply today. How do you think the regulations and rituals given after the Exodus functioned in teaching the lessons God wanted the Israelites to know? How do we know which might still apply to us today?

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6. Many commentators on the Bible regard Israel's collective promise to obey God (*see Exod. 19:8*) as boastful and misguided. If so, why? Can you think of other responses that might have been more appropriate? What distinguishes true obedience from false or misguided obedience?

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# Covenant Law



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 19:6, Isa. 56:7, Heb. 2:9, Deut. 4:13, Deut. 10:13, Amos 3:3, Gen. 18:19.*

**Memory Text:** “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments” (*Deuteronomy 7:9, NIV*).

One of the important phrases in Psalm 23 indicates *where* God desires to lead us. “He leadeth me *in the paths of righteousness* for his name’s sake,” David declares in verse 3 (emphasis supplied). Because of His own moral uprightness, God will never lead us astray. He will provide safe paths for our spiritual walk through life.

What are the safe “paths of righteousness”? A writer of another psalm answers this question through a prayer request: “Make me to go *in the path of thy commandments*; for therein do I delight” (*Ps. 119:35, emphasis supplied*). “All thy commandments are righteousness” (*Ps. 119:172*). God’s law is a safe, firm path through the treacherous swamp of human existence.

Our study this week centers on God’s law and its place in the Sinai covenant.

**The Week at a Glance:** What did Israel’s election mean? How does Israel’s election parallel our own? How important was the law in the covenant? Does the covenant come unconditionally? Why is obedience such an integral part of the covenant relationship?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 22.



## The Election of Israel *(Deut. 7:7)*

Jewish tradition has taught that God made the covenant with Israel only because other nations rejected it first. Though there is no biblical evidence for that position, it does, however, help bring home the point that for whatever reasons the Lord chose the Hebrew nation, it was not because they were deserving of the high honor and privilege the Lord bestowed upon them. They had no merit of their own that would make them worthy of God's love and His choice of them as His people. They were few in number, a group of enslaved tribes, and politically and militarily weak. Plus, in terms of culture and religion, they were mixed, bland, and without much influence. The basic cause, then, for Israel's election lay in the mystery of God's love and grace.

**At the same time,** however, we need to be careful as we look at this idea of election, because it is fraught with the potential for theological misunderstanding. What did God choose Israel for? Was it to be redeemed, while everyone else was chosen to be rejected and lost? Or were they chosen to be vehicles who would offer the world what they had been offered? How do the following verses help us understand the answers to these questions?

*Exod. 19:6* \_\_\_\_\_

*Isa. 56:7* \_\_\_\_\_

*Heb. 2:9* \_\_\_\_\_

As Seventh-day Adventists, we like to view ourselves as the modern-day counterpart of Israel, called by the Lord, not to be the only ones redeemed but to proclaim the message of redemption to the world, in the context of the three angels' messages. In short, we believe we have something to say that no one else is saying. This was basically the situation with ancient Israel, as well. The purpose of Israel's election was not to turn the Hebrew nation into some exclusive club, hoarding the promise of salvation and redemption for themselves. On the contrary, if we believe that Christ died for all humanity (*Heb. 2:9*), then the redemption the Lord offered Israel was offered to the whole world, as well. Israel was supposed to be the vehicle by which this redemption was to be made known. Our church has been called to do the same thing.

**Look at your own role in the church. What can you do to help promote the work that we have been called to do? Remember, if you are not actively helping, more than likely you are, to some degree, standing in the way.**

## Ties That Bind

**“And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone” (Deut. 4:13).**

However much we have been stressing that the covenant is always a covenant of grace, that it is only the result of God’s bestowing unmerited favor upon those who enter into a saving relationship with Him, grace is not a license to disobey. On the contrary, covenant and law belong together; they are, in fact, inseparable.

**Look** at the text quoted above. How tightly does it link the covenant and the law? How does it show how basic the law is to the covenant?

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When you think about what a covenant is, the concept of law as an integral part makes sense. If we understand the covenant as, among other things, a relationship, then some sort of rules and boundaries need to be drawn. How long would a marriage or a friendship or a business partnership last if there were no boundaries or rules, either specifically expressed or tacitly understood? The husband decides to take a girlfriend or the friend decides to help himself to the other’s wallet, or one business partner without telling the other invites another person to join their venture. These acts would be a violation of rules, laws, and principles. How long would these relationships last under such lawless circumstances? That is why there have to be boundaries, lines drawn, and rules established. Only through these can the relationship be maintained.

In fact, various expressions such as “law” (*Ps. 78:10*), “statutes” (*Ps. 50:16*), “testimonies” (*Ps. 25:10*), “commandments” (*Ps. 103:18*), and “word” of the Lord (*Deut. 33:9*) are found parallel to or in closest association with (if not having almost the same meaning as) the word “covenant.” Evidently “the words of this covenant” (*Jer. 11:3, 6, 8*) are the words of God’s law, statutes, testimonies, and commandments.

The covenant of God with His people Israel contained various requirements that would be crucial for maintaining the special relationship He sought with His people. Is it any different today?

**Think of someone you have a close relationship with. Now, imagine what would happen to that relationship if you didn’t feel bound by any rules, norms, or laws, but believed you had total freedom to do whatever you wanted. Even if you say that you love this person and that love alone will decide how you relate to him or her, why is there still a need for rules? Discuss.**

## Law Within the Covenant *(Deut. 10:12, 13)*

What are your first thoughts when you think of law? Police officers, traffic tickets, judges, and jail? Or do you think of restrictions, rules, authoritarian parents, and punishment? Or, perhaps, do you think of order, harmony, stability? Or maybe even . . . love?

The Hebrew word *Torah*, translated as “law” in our Bibles, means “teaching” or “instruction.” The term can be used to refer to all God’s instructions, whether moral, civil, social, or religious. It implies all the wise counsels God has graciously given His people, so they may experience an abundant life both physically and spiritually. No wonder the psalmist could call the man blessed whose “delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (*Ps. 1:2*).

As we read the *law*, or *Torah*—the instructions and teachings recorded in the books of Moses that became a part of Israel’s covenant—we are impressed with the wide range of instruction. The law touches upon every part of Israel’s lifestyle—agriculture, civil government, social relationships, and worship.

**Why** do you suppose God provided so much instruction for Israel? (*See Deut. 10:13.*) **In what ways** were these instructions for their “good”?

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The work of the “law” within the covenant was to provide guidelines to the new life of the human covenant partner. The law introduces the member of the covenant to the will of God, whom one comes to know in the fullest sense through obedience by faith to His commandments and other expressions of His will.

The part played by the law within the living reality of the covenant relationship showed that Israel could not follow the ways of other nations. They could not live by natural law, human needs, desires, or even social, political, and economic necessities alone. They could continue as God’s holy nation, priestly kingdom, and special treasure only through uncompromising obedience to the revealed will of the covenant-making God in all areas of life.

**Like ancient Israel, Seventh-day Adventists have received a wide range of counsels pertaining to every phase of Christian living through a modern manifestation of the prophetic gift. Why should we view these counsels as a gift from God rather than a detriment to independent thought and action? At the same time, what dangers do we face of turning that gift into something legalistic, as the Israelites did with their gifts? (*See Rom. 9:32.*)**

## The Stability of God's Law

**What truth about God does the presence of God's law in the covenant relationship teach us about His essential nature?** (See *Mal. 3:6*, *James 1:17*.)

God's law is an oral or written expression of His will (see *Ps. 40:8*). Because it is a transcript of His character, its presence in the covenant assures us of the permanence and dependability of God. Although we may not always be able to discern the outworkings of His providence, we know He is trustworthy. His universe is under unvarying moral and physical laws. It is this fact that gives us true freedom and security.

The "assurance that God is reliable and dependable lies in the truth that He is a God of law. His will and His law are one. God says that right is right because it describes the best possible relationships. Therefore God's law is never arbitrary or subject to whim and fancy. It is the most stable thing in the universe."—Walter R. Beach, *Dimensions in Salvation* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1963), p. 143.

**If God's law cannot save a person from sin, why did He make it a part of the covenant?** (Hint: see *Amos 3:3*.)

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A relationship requires agreement and harmony. Because God is not only the Creator of the world but also its moral Governor, law is essential for the happiness of His created, intelligent beings to live in harmony with Him. His law, the expression of His will, is thus the constitution of His government. It is naturally the norm or obligation of the covenant arrangement and relationship. Its purpose is not to save but to define our duty to God (commandments 1–4) and our duty to our fellow human beings (commandments 5–10). In other words, it sets forth the manner of life that God designs for His covenant children to live, for their own happiness and well-being. It prevented Israel from substituting some other philosophy as a way of life. It was and is the purpose of the covenant relationship to bring the believer through God's transforming grace into harmony with His will and character.

**Look around. Can you not see the devastating effects of lawlessness? Even in your own life, can you not see some damage done by breaking God's law? In what ways do these realities help to affirm the goodness of God's law and why law should be a crucial part of our relationship with Him?**

**If . . .**

**Look** up the following verses. What is the one point they have in common, and what does it teach about the nature of the covenant?

Gen. 18:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Gen. 26:4, 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Exod. 19:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Lev. 26:3 \_\_\_\_\_

God openly acknowledges Abraham's faithful obedience to "my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (*Gen. 26:5*). It is implied that God expects such a lifestyle from His human partner in the covenant. The full statement of the biblical covenant at Sinai makes it abundantly evident that conditions of obedience are one of the basic aspects of the covenant.

Exodus 19:5 makes it clear: "If ye will obey . . ." The conditional aspect of the covenant is undeniable; though bestowed by grace, though unearned, though a gift to them, the covenant promises were not unconditional. The people could reject the gift, deny the grace, and turn away from the promises. The covenant, as with salvation, never negates free will. The Lord does not force people into a saving relationship with Him; He doesn't impose a covenant upon them. He freely offers it to everyone; everyone is invited to accept it. When a person does accept it, obligations follow, not as a means of earning the covenant blessing but as an outward manifestation of having received the covenant blessings. Israel should obey, not in order to earn the promises, but so that the promises could be fulfilled in her. Her obedience was an expression of what it is like to be blessed by the Lord. Obedience does not earn the blessings, in that God is obligated to bring them; obedience, instead, creates an environment in which the blessing of faith can be made manifest.

**"Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess" (*Deut. 5:33*). Is the Lord saying here to Israel that if they obey, they will earn these blessings, that these blessings are what the people are owed? Or is He saying: If you obey, these blessings can result because obedience opens the way for Me to be able to bring the blessings upon you? What is the difference between the two ideas?**

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “Controversy,” pp. 607, 608, in *The Desire of Ages*; and “The Law and the Covenants,” pp. 363–373, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

How does Matthew 22:34–40 help us better understand (1) the place and meaning of God’s law within His covenant and (2) the concept that covenant is synonymous with relationship?

“There must first be love in the heart before a person can, in the strength and by the grace of Christ, begin to observe the precepts of God’s law (*cf. Rom. 8:3, 4*). Obedience without love is as impossible as it is worthless. But where love is present a person will automatically set out to order his life in harmony with the will of God as expressed in His commandments.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 484.

“In the precepts of His holy law, God has given a perfect rule of life; and He has declared that until the close of time this law, unchanged in a single jot or tittle, is to maintain its claim upon human beings. Christ came to magnify the law and make it honorable. He showed that it is based upon the broad foundation of love to God and love to man, and that obedience to its precepts comprises the whole duty of man. In His own life He gave an example of obedience to the law of God. In the Sermon on the Mount He showed how its requirements extend beyond the outward acts and take cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 505.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why does the thread of love exert a stronger pull than the rope of fear to draw human beings to God?
- ❷ Why is the command to “ ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ ” (*Matt. 22:37, NIV*) the first and greatest commandment?
- ❸ Simone Weil once wrote that “ ‘order is the first need of all.’ ”—Quoted in Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1992), p. 3. How do you understand her words in the context of the week’s study, particularly in relation to the idea of law?

**Summary:** God’s law was an integral part of the covenant. Yet, it was a true covenant of grace. Grace, however, never nullifies the need for law. On the contrary, law is a means by which grace is manifested and expressed in the lives of those who receive grace.

## Unexplainable Hospital Visit

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

In Medellin, Colombia, Hernando Díaz stepped out of the hospital to rest. He had spent the past two hours with his young son, Samuel, as the boy's blood was cleaned by a dialysis machine with an artificial kidney. His wife, Erica, was now sitting with the boy for the last two hours of hemodialysis.

Hernando collapsed onto a bench near a water fountain, and he turned on a sermon on his cell phone. Moments later, a stranger walked up and asked whether he could sit on the bench. Hernando nodded, listening to the sermon over the cell phone speaker. The stranger's own cell phone rang.

"I've decided to kill myself," the stranger angrily told the caller. "I haven't been able to find work for two years, and I don't want to live. Don't call me."

As he spoke, he seemed to forget Hernando on the bench. But when he hung up, he came back to reality. The sermon caught his attention.

"Is that a Christian preacher?" he asked.

"Yes, he is," Hernando said. "I heard that you want to take your life."

"Yes, that is what I want to do," the man said. "I cannot bear it anymore."

"I don't think that it is a coincidence that you sat with me," Hernando said. "You need help. Would you like help?"

"Yes, I would like help."

"What do you do?"

"I'm an accountant, and I have a family that I can't support."

"If someone told you, 'I can help you and supply your needs and give you hope for a better future,' would you accept it?"

"Of course!"

Hernando spoke about Jesus, and the man gave his heart to Jesus on the spot. Hernando encouraged him to send out his résumé with faith. The next day, Hernando sat on the same bench and saw the man looking for him.

"Guess what!" the man said. "Someone called with a job offer. I feel great!"

Hernando praised God and curiously asked whom he had visited at the hospital the previous day. The man said he didn't know anyone at the hospital. "Yesterday I felt an irresistible urge to come to the hospital," he said. "I sat next to you because I didn't know what to do."

Hernando, a Seventh-day Adventist physician at the Adventist Medical Center on the campus of Colombia Adventist University in Medellin, has many similar stories. During the past five years, more than 100 people have changed their minds about committing suicide after praying with him.

"They now are living normal lives," he said.



*This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a missionary training center at Colombia Adventist University.*

**Study Focus:** *Deuteronomy 7:9****Part I: Overview***

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The covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai was meant to be an example of God's grace that all would see who came into contact with His people. The covenant defined Israel's relationship with God. It also provided parameters within which Israel could work and live that would best spread God's message.

***Part II: Commentary***

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Examples of Yahweh's reaching other nations before Israel's election rest on earlier passages such as Genesis 20:3–6 and Genesis 21:32. Is it not striking to discover, in response to Yahweh, King Abimelech, a Philistine, referred to his *Hamitic nation* as “*a righteous nation*”?

“Yahweh has always been in contact with *non-Hebrews and chose to make 'heathens' His representatives and agents, even priests according to His will.* . . .

“Yahweh uses Jethro the Kenite, who was familiar with the name Yahweh before Moses, and, in fact, helped him to understand it, to facilitate His plans and purposes for humankind. . . . Here we have a so-called *heathen*, Afro-Asiatic people preserving this vital intelligence before the Hebrews came on the scene!”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, p. 36; emphasis supplied.

**The Election of Israel**

Likewise, a Hebrew nation had been carved out from an *Abrahamic* lineage. Ancient Israel sprang from divine providence in order to sprinkle its God-ordained witness to surrounding nations. Thus, the connection between Israel's election and Yahweh's cosmic law merits explanation: “The giving of the law is as much an act of grace as God's gift of election. The giving of the law is as much an act of mercy as the deliverance from Egyptian slavery. The gift of law is as much an act of God's love as the making of the covenant to which the law belongs. The law thus becomes an instrument defining all relationships within the covenant and the covenant community.”—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, p. 72.

**Law Within the Covenant**

“The Hebrew word *law (tôrāh)* appears in the Old Testament no less



than 220 times. It must not be taken to mean ‘law’ in the Latin sense of *lex*, meaning law of the empire. Nor is it to be understood as the Greeks understood their word for law (*nomos*), namely, that which had always been done. In the Hebrew language the term *tôrāh* comes from the word *hôrāh*, meaning ‘to point out,’ ‘to teach, or ‘to instruct.’ Accordingly, the noun *tôrāh* means in its broadest sense ‘teaching’ or ‘instruction.’ In this sense, the word *law* signifies all the revealed will of God, or any part of it.

“God gave Israel this instruction, this *tôrāh*, in terms of ‘statutes and ordinances’ (Deuteronomy 4:14, RSV) or ‘the testimonies, the statutes, and the ordinances’ (verse 45, RSV) to regulate the life of Israel. *Tôrāh* is used in this sense frequently. Thus law could be a comprehensive kind of ‘instruction’ that included all the laws: moral and ethical, civil and social, sacrificial and worship, and hygienic and health.

“In other instances, *law* (*tôrāh*) can be used in a very narrow sense, meaning only the Ten Commandments or Decalogue.”—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant*, p. 73.

### The Stability of the Law

The psalmist sings: “The law of Jehovah is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of Jehovah is pure, making the simple wise. The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart; the commands of Jehovah are clear, giving light to the eyes. . . . The judgments of Jehovah are true, they are righteous altogether. They are more precious than gold, . . . and sweeter than honey and drops from the honeycomb.”—*The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1400. (See Ps. 19:7–10.)

We should ever be mindful of the fact that our need of God’s law is linked to the lawless condition of the human psyche, and not simply our need to rectify sinful actions. Only Christ is able to incorporate His serenity and stability within humankind, and He does this by pointing us to Himself (see Isa. 26:3, Matthew 12).

At the same time, the law had been given, and still remains, for our benefit. Who hasn’t suffered, or seen others suffer, from disobedience to God’s law? Think of how much better our world would be if people obeyed God’s law. Think of how much better it would be if people obeyed even just the last six commandments!

Meanwhile, Paul tells us the following: “But now He reconciled in the body of His flesh, through death, to present you holy and without blame, and without charge before Him, *if you continue in the faith grounded and settled*, and not being moved from the hope of the gospel.”—*The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, vol. 4, pp. 542, 543; emphasis supplied. (See Col. 1:21–23.)

For the believer, spiritual maturity in Colossians is not summed up in a moment. Growth in grace had been perceived by Paul as a regenerative lifetime process. Hence, this Pauline account restated the conditional terms of the covenant of grace as Yahweh had established with ancient

Israel. (Study *Exod. 19:5; Lev. 26:3, 4, 14, 16; Deut. 5:33; Deut. 6:5; Deut. 10:12; Deut. 11:1, 13, 22; and Deut. 13:3, 18.*)

“Thus it is evident that the way of salvation in the Old Testament and the way of salvation in the New Testament are the same—both being salvation by grace through faith, which results in obedience.”—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant*, p. 78.

On the other hand, it is just as important to keep in mind the sheer impossibility of repentance, apart from Christ, in the arena of sanctification: “You cannot have a thought without Christ. You cannot have an inclination to come to Him unless He sets in motion influences and impresses His Spirit upon the human mind.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 73. (Study *John 14:15, John 15–17, Acts 5:32, Rom. 2:4, 1 Corinthians 13, Gal. 5:14–26, Eph. 2:8–10, Ephesians 5, 1 John 4:7–21, 1 John 5:1–3, and Rev. 22:14.*)

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Reflection:** William Barclay said that to be truly religious is to love God and to love the ones whom God made in His own image. This love is not some vague, nebulous sentimentality but a full commitment to God that issues forth from the heart in practical service toward our fellow humans.

- 1. Read Deuteronomy 6:5. This verse is part of the “Shema,” Judaism’s creed. Every religious service opens with this sentence. Every Jewish child memorizes it before anything else. It is a constant reminder that our love to God must come before everything else. Read Jesus’ words in Matthew 22:34–40. How are we like the Pharisees pictured here? How does the new covenant emphasize the application of love?**
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- 2. God gives us His law within the realm of His unfathomable love. Compare the relationship between God and humanity with the relationship between a parent and child. What is the purpose of law in a love relationship? How do boundaries and spoken expectations enhance a relationship? What do God’s laws and boundaries teach us about His character?**

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3. Name two or three specific incidents from Jesus' life that are examples of how He truly loved His neighbor as Himself. What if Jesus were to walk the streets of your town today? How would He show love for your neighbors, and why? When you break part of God's law, His grace comes to the rescue. Does this mean that grace nullifies the law? Explain. Think of instances in which you have appreciated boundaries set by the Bible, the church, or society. Share an example with your class.
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4. The old covenant played an important role in Israel's exodus from Egypt. This covenant was a sign of God's protective love and care. In your spiritual life, how does the covenant translate into signs of God's love and care? What is your role in the process of experiencing what it means to live in a covenant relationship with Christ?
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5. Read, again, the thought above from William Barclay in the For Reflection section. Think of specific ways we love God and humanity with "nebulous sentimentality." What can you do in your local church to encourage one another to be more sincere in your love to God and your neighbor? Name things, issues, and circumstances that interfere with your attempts to be sincere. How can you protect yourself from these interferences?
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6. As noted, God's law as given to the Israelites was almost painfully specific. Why might God be so concerned about how His children conduct their lives? Is it for our own good or His? Discuss. Can God be impacted by our choices? Explain.

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7. Both Israel and the church, as the elect of God, were, and are, in possession of something the world at large needed and still needs but of which it was and is mostly unaware. For the most part, Israel did little to change this. Is it possible that we today run the risk of making ourselves ineffectual or irrelevant? Explain.
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8. One occasionally hears the quip that the Ten Commandments have today become the Ten Suggestions. Do we, in fact, sometimes act as if that were the case? Explain. How can we distinguish between freedom and license in our own lives?
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9. Is obedience to the law a condition of having a relationship with God? If so, is it an error to say that God's gift of eternal life and His continuing presence are in some sense unconditional? Explain. Do we have any basis for believing in the unconditionality of God's love? Why, or why not?
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10. In thinking about the issue of obedience, we tend to think of it as something that we *do*. Is it not equally true that it could be a description of what we *are* when we choose to associate ourselves with God? Explain.
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# Covenant Sign



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:11; Exodus 16; Heb. 4:1–4; Exod. 31:12–17; Deut. 5:14.*

**Memory Text:** “Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant” (*Exodus 31:16*).

The seventh-day Sabbath is like a nail that—*Thwack!*—with unbroken regularity returns us each week to the foundation of all that we are or could be. We are so busy, running to and fro, spending money, making money, going here, going there, going everywhere, and then—*Thwack!*—Sabbath comes and reattaches us to our foundation, the starting point of everything that follows, because everything that is anything to us becomes that only because God created it and us to begin with.

With unceasing regularity, and with no exceptions, the Sabbath silently hurls over the horizon and into every crack and cranny of our lives. It reminds us that every crack and cranny belongs to our Maker, the One who put us here, the One who “in the beginning” created the heavens and the earth, an act that remains the irrefutable foundation of all Christian belief and of which the seventh-day Sabbath—*Thwack!*—is the irrefutable, unobtrusive, and unyielding sign.

This week we look at this sign in the context of the Sinai covenant.

**The Week at a Glance:** Where does the Sabbath have its origins? What evidence proves that the Sabbath existed before Sinai? What makes the Sabbath such an appropriate covenant sign?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 29.

## Origins

How often we hear the phrase, the “old Jewish Sabbath.” Yet, Scripture is clear that the Sabbath existed long before there were any Jewish people. Its origin is found in the Creation week itself.

**Look up Genesis 2:2, 3 and Exodus 20:11. Where do they clearly, and unambiguously, place the origin of the Sabbath?**

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Although Genesis 2:2, 3 does not identify the “seventh day” as the Sabbath (this identification comes first in Exodus 16:26, 29), it is clearly suggested in the phrase “he rested on the seventh day” (*Gen. 2:2*). The word *rested* (Hebrew, *shabat*) is closely related to the noun *Sabbath* (Hebrew, *shabbat*). “The word ‘sabbath’ is not employed [in Gen. 2:2, 3], but it is certain that the author meant to assert that God blessed and hallowed the seventh day as the Sabbath.”—G. F. Waterman, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), vol. 5, p. 183. Evidently, Genesis 2:2, 3 teaches the divine origin and institution of the Sabbath as a day of blessing for all humanity.

Read Mark 2:27. Jesus says that Sabbath was made for, literally, “man,” meaning humanity as a whole, as opposed to the Jews alone.

**Why would God Himself rest on the seventh day? Did He need it? What other purpose might His resting have served?**

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Although some commentators have suggested that God needed physical rest after Creation, the true purpose of God in resting was to provide a divine example for humanity. Humankind also is to work for six days and then to rest on the seventh-day Sabbath. Theologian Karl Barth suggested that God’s resting at the end of Creation was a part of the “covenant of grace,” in which humankind was invited “to rest with Him . . . to participate in [God’s] rest.”—*Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, Ltd., 1958), vol. 3, p. 98.

God in His love called the man and the woman on the day after their creation to fellowship in rest, to establish intimate communion with Him in whose image they had been made. That fellowship and communion was to last forever. Since the fall of humankind, the Sabbath has offered a weekly high point in one’s life with the Savior.

**If someone were to ask you, “How has keeping the Sabbath benefited your relationship with the Lord,” how would you respond?**

## Sabbath Before Sinai

“And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning” (Exod. 16:23).

Skim through Exodus 16, the story of the manna provided to Israel, in the desert, before Sinai. Notice what this account reveals:

1. Only a regular portion of manna could be used each day; but on the sixth day a double portion was to be gathered.
2. No manna was given on the Sabbath.
3. The extra portion needed for the Sabbath was preserved from the sixth day unspoiled, while the manna would not keep on any other day.

**What** does this story reveal about the sanctity of the Sabbath before the giving of the law at Sinai? (See Exod. 16:23–28.)

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“In fact, the equation of the Sabbath with the seventh day, the statement that the Lord gave the Israelites the Sabbath, and the record that the people, at God’s command, rested on the seventh day, all point unmistakably to the primeval [at Creation] institution of the Sabbath.”—G. F. Waterman, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), vol. 5, p. 184.

**There** is a lot more about the Sabbath in Exodus 16 than first meets the eye. Look at the questions this passage answers for us:

1. Which day is the preparation day for the Sabbath?
2. Which day of the week is the Sabbath?
3. Where did the Sabbath come from?
4. What kind of day should the Sabbath be?
5. Is the Sabbath a day of fasting?
6. Is the Sabbath a test of loyalty to God?

How does your understanding of the Sabbath today match with what is taught about the Sabbath in Exodus 16?

## Covenant Sign

“ ‘ “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed” ’ ” (*Exod. 31:16, 17, NIV*).

Four times in Scripture the Sabbath is designated as a “sign” (*Exod. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12, 20*). A “sign” is not a “symbol” in the sense of a thing that naturally typifies, represents, or recalls something else, because both share similar qualities (for example, a symbol of a fist often denotes “might” or “power”). In the Bible, the Sabbath as a “sign” functioned as an outward mark or object or condition intended to convey a distinctive message. Nothing in the sign *itself* particularly linked it to the covenant. The Sabbath was a covenant sign “ ‘ “between me and you throughout your generations” ’ ” (*Exod. 31:13, RSV*) only because God said it was.

**Why** would the Lord use the Sabbath as a covenant sign? What is it about the Sabbath that would make it so appropriate as a symbol of the saving relationship with God? As we remember that a crucial aspect of the covenant is that we are saved by grace and that works cannot save us, what is it about the Sabbath itself that makes it such a good symbol of that relationship? (*See Gen. 2:3, Heb. 4:1–4.*)

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What is fascinating about the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant of grace is that for centuries the Jews have understood the Sabbath to be the sign of Messianic redemption. They saw in the Sabbath a foretaste of salvation in the Messiah. Because we understand redemption as coming only from grace, and because we understand the covenant to be a covenant of grace, the link between the Sabbath, redemption, and the covenant is made clear (*see Deut. 5:13–15*). Thus, contrary to common opinion, the Sabbath is a sign of God’s saving grace; it’s not a sign of salvation by works.

**How do you understand what it means to “rest” on the Sabbath? How do you rest on the Sabbath? What do you do differently on that day that makes it a “sign”? Could someone who knows you look at your life and see that the Sabbath really is a special day for you?**

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## Sign of Sanctification

“ ‘You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you’ ” (Exod. 31:13, RSV).

An exceptionally rich Sabbath passage is Exodus 31:12–17, which follows the Lord’s directions for the building of the sanctuary and the establishment of its services (Exod. 25:1–31:11).

The concept of the Sabbath as a “sign”—a visible, external, and *eternal* sign between God and His people—is expressed here in this manner for the first time. The text itself contains some fascinating concepts worthy of our study. Two new ideas are joined together in this text:

1. The Sabbath as a *sign of knowledge*.
2. The Sabbath as a *sign of sanctification*.

Consider the sign aspect related to knowledge. The Hebrew understanding of knowledge includes intellectual, relational, and emotional aspects. “To know” did not simply mean to know a fact, particularly when a person was involved. It also meant to have a meaningful relationship with the one known. Thus *to know the Lord* meant to be in a right relationship with Him—to “serve” Him (1 Chron. 28:9), to “fear” Him (Isa. 11:2), to “believe” Him (Isa. 43:10), to “trust” Him and “seek” Him (Ps. 9:10), and to “call on” His name (Jer. 10:25).

**Look** up each of the texts in the above paragraph. In what ways do these texts help us to understand what it means to “know” the Lord?

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In addition, the Sabbath has significance as a sign of sanctification. It signifies that the Lord “sanctifies” His people (*compare Lev. 20:8*) by making them “holy” (Deut. 7:6).

The sanctification process is as much the work of God’s redemptive love as is the saving and redeeming work of God. Righteousness (justification) and sanctification are both activities of God: “ ‘I . . . the LORD . . . sanctify you’ ” (Lev. 20:8, RSV). Thus, the Sabbath is a sign that imparts the knowledge of God as Sanctifier. “The Sabbath given to the world as the sign of God as the Creator is also the sign of Him as the Sanctifier.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 350.

**Consider the Sabbath day and the process of sanctification, that of *being made holy*. What role does Sabbath keeping have in this process? How can the Lord use our experience of keeping the Sabbath to help sanctify us?**

## Remembering the Sabbath

**“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy”** (*Exod. 20:8*).

The Sabbath was and is a sign for humanity to “remember.” The use of the word *remember* can serve various functions. First, *to remember* something implies looking backward, looking to the past. In this case, the Sabbath points us to the fiat Creation, which climaxed in the institution of the Sabbath as a weekly day of rest and special communion with God.

The injunction to remember also has implications for the present. We are not only to “remember” the Sabbath (*Exod. 20:8*); we also are to “observe” and “keep” it (*see Deut. 5:12, RSV*). Thus, the Sabbath has important implications for us now, in the present.

Finally, remembering the Sabbath also points us forward. The person who remembers the keeping of the Sabbath has a promising, rich, and meaningful future with the Lord of the Sabbath. He or she remains in the covenant relationship, because he or she remains in the Lord. Again, when we understand the covenant to be a relationship between God and humankind, the Sabbath, which greatly can help strengthen that relationship, comes into specific prominence.

Indeed, in remembering Creation and its Creator, God’s people also remember God’s gracious acts of salvation (*see Deuteronomy 5:14, where the Sabbath is seen, in this context, as a sign of deliverance from Egypt, a symbol of the ultimate salvation found in God*). Creation and re-creation belong together. The former makes the latter possible. The Sabbath is a sign that communicates that God is the Creator of the world and the Creator of our salvation.

**“By keeping His Sabbath holy we are to show that we are His people. His Word declares the Sabbath to be a sign by which to distinguish the commandment-keeping people. . . . Those who keep the law of God will be one with Him in the great controversy commenced in heaven between Satan and God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 160.**

**Look at this statement from the Lord’s servant. What is it about the Sabbath that makes it something that can distinguish us as “the commandment-keeping people,” perhaps more so than any of the other commandments?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, pp. 968–970, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7; “The Observance of the Sabbath,” pp. 349–351, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6; “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pp. 295–297, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

The Ten Commandments define comprehensively and fundamentally the divine-human and human-human relationships. The commandment at the center of the Decalogue is the Sabbath commandment. It identifies the Lord of the Sabbath in a special way and indicates His sphere of authority and ownership. Note these two aspects: (1) the identity of the Deity: Yahweh (LORD), who is the Creator (*Exod. 20:11, Exod. 31:17*) and who thus holds a unique place; (2) the sphere of His ownership and authority—“the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them” (*Exod. 20:11, NASB; compare Exod. 31:17*). In these two aspects, the Sabbath commandment has the characteristics that are typical of seals of international, ancient Near Eastern treaty documents. These seals are typically in the center of the treaty documents and also contain (1) the identity of a deity (usually a pagan god) and (2) the sphere of ownership and authority (usually a limited geographical area).

“The sanctification of the Spirit signalizes the difference between those who have the seal of God and those who keep a spurious rest day.

“When the test comes, it will be clearly shown what the mark of the beast is. It is the keeping of Sunday. . . .

“God has designated the seventh day as His Sabbath [Ex. 31:13, 17, 16 quoted].

“Thus the distinction is drawn between the loyal and the disloyal. Those who desire to have the seal of God in their foreheads must keep the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 980, 981.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① Read Leviticus 19:30. Notice how it links the sanctuary and the Sabbath. Considering what we have learned so far about what the Sabbath is a sign of, why does that linkage make so much sense?
- ② Ask yourself this question: Has Sabbath keeping helped strengthen my walk with the Lord? If not, what changes can you make?

**Summary:** The Sabbath is a covenant sign that reaches forward to the time when the plan of salvation will be consummated. It points back to Creation, and as a sign of the covenant of grace, it points us to the final re-creation, when God makes all things new.

## Bawling Tattoo Artist

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Dr. Hernando Díaz was assisting a patient at the Adventist Medical Center in Medellín, Colombia, when a shadowy figure at his office door startled him. It was a shaven-headed man covered with explicit tattoos. Tattoos formed a black-and-blue web over his head. Tattoos covered his arms and hands.

“It’s my turn to see you,” the man declared.

“Please wait for your turn,” Hernando said.

Several minutes later, the man entered the office and immediately broke into tears. The big, burly bloke was bawling like a baby. Hernando looked at the man’s paperwork. It said he was HIV positive. “I don’t want to have HIV,” the man said, tears streaming down his tattooed cheeks.

“What happened?” Hernando asked. “What do you do?”

“I’m a tattoo artist, and the body is my canvas,” the man said.

“How did you contract HIV? Are you promiscuous or a homosexual?”

The man said he was neither and had contracted HIV through his work.

“But I don’t want HIV,” he said. “I don’t want to die.”

“There is Someone who can heal you,” Hernando said. “I know you may not believe in God, but He can help you.”

The man acknowledged being an atheist. But he was willing to reconsider.

“Do you want me to pray for you?” Hernando said. “Do you want to accept Jesus as your Savior?”

“Yes,” the man said, weeping.

Hernando led the man through the sinner’s prayer. When the man said Jesus’ name at the end, he fell to the floor.

Hernando sent the tattoo artist away for a second HIV test. The next week, the man returned with a happy grin on his face. “I don’t have HIV,” he said. “I want to give thanks to God and you because God has healed me.”

Follow-up testing had given him a clean bill of health. He considered his HIV-negative status to be a miracle from God.

Months later, Hernando and his wife, Erica, were shopping at a mall when they heard someone screaming, “Doctor! Doctor!” The tattoo artist ran over to Hernando and lifted him off the ground in an enormous bear hug. He

praised God for working a miracle in his life.

The tattoo artist is one of dozens of people led to Jesus by Hernando, a 60-year-old Seventh-day Adventist physician serving at the Adventist Medical Center on the campus of Colombia Adventist University in Medellín.




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*This quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a missionary training center at Colombia Adventist University.*

**Study Focus:** *Exodus 31:16****Part I: Overview***

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The Sabbath goes beyond being a mere allotment of time; it is a promise of a rich and meaningful relationship with God. It is a day we set aside everything in our lives except God and take time to strengthen our relationship with Him.

***Part II: Commentary***

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The Sabbath can be understood only if we consider its genesis. The term “rest” in Genesis 2:3 derives from the Hebrew verbal form *shabath* (to repose, to celebrate, to cease, to desist from labor, to put to an end, to rest, to be completed, to keep Sabbath, to observe). Interestingly, this verb is linked to observing the weekly *shabbat* (sabbath, sabbath of sabbatic observance). Read Leviticus 25:2. See Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, pp. 991, 992.

**Origins**

From the start, *sin-based commands* were not needed for Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, because there was no sin. On the other hand: “The law of God existed before the creation of man or else Adam could not have sinned.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 14, 1878.

Meanwhile, the authoritative example of Adam’s Father keeping the Sabbath was more than a commandment. From Eden’s perspective, a created son follows the example of a Creator-Father. Hence, centuries before the Jews came to be, the Creation Sabbath became an unrivaled memorial in time, validating Christ as cosmic Creator and Sovereign (see *Matt. 12:8, Mark 2:28, John 8:58*).

Therefore, *Shabbath* (Sabbath) fulfills a cosmological, rather than just a theological, function. It serves to explain how Yahweh felt about His creation. In essence, Yahweh imprinted a divine seal on this day as an immutable testament of His majestic role as cosmic Framer. Hence, when Yahweh *rested* on the seventh day, He *held it in divine reserve for the cosmos*.

“Sabbath is the pause that refreshes. The pattern is six days and one day. Six days of work and one day of rest. . . . Yahweh the cosmic symphony conductor orders His composition on 6/7 time. One, two, three,

four, five, six, rest!”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, p. 58. “The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was instituted in Eden.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 295.

### **Sabbath Before Sinai**

“Missiologists recognize a Hebraic consciousness among the African peoples. . . . W. W. Oliphant, an African church leader in the early years of the twentieth century, says that the ‘Sabbath in Ethiopia [has] been kept from the days of Nimrod, about 2140 B.C. (read Gen. 10:8, 9), that is 700 years before the birth of Moses. . . . Africans or Ethiopians had been Sabbath observers from the days of Nimrod, the son of Cush.’ ”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, p. 26.

### **Covenant Sign**

“The Sabbath is a covenant sign ‘between me and you throughout your generations’ (Exodus 31:13; compare Ezekiel 20:12). . . . The person who keeps the Sabbath in the right spirit thereby signifies that he or she stands in a saved relationship with God.

“The Sabbath as a sign imparts to the believer first of all the knowledge that the Lord is his covenant God. It also indicates that the Lord ‘sanctifies’ His people (Leviticus 20:8; 21:8; 22:32; Ezekiel 37:28). . . .

“The Sabbath functions in yet another sense as a sign. It serves as a mark of separation, indicating to people of other religions or to people who do not keep the Sabbath that a unique relationship exists between God and His Sabbath-keeping people.”—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant*, pp. 86–88. (Read *Exodus 32 and Deut. 5:15.*)

### **Sign of Sanctification**

The Creation Sabbath is indeed God’s sanctuary enshrined in time. In other words: “Yahweh, having put His best into His creation, declares it very good. Then, consummate artist that He is, God takes the fabric of time and makes something special out of it, the Sabbath, a cathedral in time, sculpted from hours and minutes and spun out of the stuff of eternity. A gift from His own heart.

“It should be observed that God does not make the Sabbath and bring humanity to it. He creates Adam and Eve and brings the Sabbath to them.”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, p. 51. (See *Ezek. 20:12, 20.*)

### **Remembering the Sabbath**

“Israel knew her neighbors only too well for the comfort of the prophets. . . . We cannot escape the fact that around the fireside the elders recounted the days of Creation and most certainly the day to which all others pointed, the Sabbath. The ‘big story’ was fixed in the collective psyche of primeval peoples. Knowledge of Sabbath could be forgotten only in

rebellion against the God who created all things.

“This is why the Sabbath command begins with ‘remember.’ Sabbath always harkens back to the Creation event (Ex. 20:8–10).

“If Yahweh commands us today to remember the Sabbath, there must have been a time when He first commanded its observance. Indeed, this is the message of Israel’s experience with the manna, which Yahweh sent on six days but withheld on the seventh. In this instance He does not repeat the command because, even before Mount Sinai, they knew. . . . The fact that the word ‘remember’ is attached to the command indicates that it has been given before and does not need to be constantly reiterated.”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, pp. 79, 80.

The word “remember” was included because we need “to say ‘yes’ to the Lord of the Sabbath by making [ourselves] available to Him. It means to acknowledge God’s doing rather than trusting [our] own achievements. It means to stop worrying about [our] own wants and start thinking about the needs of others. . . . It means forgetting self and selfish interests in order like Mary to honor Christ as the special guest.”—Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: Published by Author, 1988), p. 99.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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God’s law says that the Sabbath is to be kept holy and that on it we are to do no work. The Hebrews took this command rather seriously. The Pharisees and other teachers of the law emphasized that to “carry a burden” was considered work. To avoid misunderstandings, they were very specific about what a burden was. A burden was food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

- 1. With such strict restrictions, one can imagine the many hours people spent arguing about what a neighbor should or should not have done on the Sabbath. In what ways are we stuck in similar legalistic ruts? What are the dangers of being legalistic? Does this mean we should dismiss church standards that are not completely biblical? Explain.**

2. It has been said that teaching is false if it produces a religion that consists solely or mainly of the observance of externals. How is it easy to confuse spirituality—one's relationship with Christ—with religious practices? What are the dangers of doing so? How might there be a danger of the Seventh-day Adventist Church falling into such a trap?

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3. In ancient times, the Jews' observance of the Sabbath gained them a reputation for laziness. Based on your Sabbath observance, do you think people view you as law-abiding or God-loving? What is the difference between these two characteristics? Do your Sabbath-keeping practices center on what you can and cannot do? Or do they center on strengthening your relationship with your Savior? Discuss.

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4. The new covenant is an agreement between God and you that is based on an intimate relationship. The Sabbath is quality time you spend with God. Obviously, then, Sabbath keeping is important to one's covenant relationship. How can we restore the sanctity and joy of the Sabbath to both individual and corporate lifestyles?

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5. Most religious people, if they think about it, will admit to the desirability of devoting one day a week to God. Indeed, some will say that they devote every day to God. What, however, is the evidence that God is concerned that we honor not just any day but the day He has sanctified and specifically set aside for that purpose?

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6. In our world people devote a huge amount of time and money to amusing themselves and doing a variety of things that presumably help them to "unwind." How can the rest that we are supposed to enjoy on the Sabbath be distinguished from largely self-centered entertainment and amusement?



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7. God, as we understand Him, would probably not need to rest because He was tired in our sense of the word. Yet, Genesis tells us that God rested on the seventh day. Why might God have needed to stand back from His work and “rest”?
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8. We are told in the Bible (*Exod. 31:13*, for example) that the Sabbath is to be a sign of Israel’s—and, we can infer, our—commitment to God. Is it possible that we could observe it in such a way that it would convey a message that is the opposite of what is intended? How so? How can we be sure that our Sabbath keeping represents God’s ideals?
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9. How does the Sabbath communicate the utter uniqueness of God as compared to other gods or things that people might regard with worship or special esteem?
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10. Using the Sabbath as a barometer, check to see if you base your religious beliefs on rituals or a relationship with Jesus. How did Jesus’ Sabbath activities reflect His relationship with His Father? What specific changes do you think you need to make in your Sabbath-keeping practices?
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# The New Covenant



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Jer. 31:31–34; Matt. 5:17–28; Hos. 2:18–20; Isa. 56:6, 7; Heb. 8:7, 8; Heb. 10:4; Matt. 27:51.*

**Memory Text:** “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah’ ” (*Jeremiah 31:31, RSV*).

A cartoon in a magazine years ago showed a business executive in an office standing before other executives. He was holding a box of detergent in his hands, showing it to the other men and women. He proudly pointed to the word “New” that was displayed in large red letters on the box, the implication being, of course, that the product was new. The executive then said, “It’s the ‘New’ on the box that is new.” In other words, all that changed, all that was new, was simply the word *New* on the box. Everything else was the same.

In a sense, one could say that the new covenant is like that. The basis of the covenant, the basic hope that it has for us, its basic conditions, are the same as what was found in the old covenant. It has always been a covenant of God’s grace and mercy, a covenant based on a love that transcends human foibles and defeats.

**The Week at a Glance:** What parallels exist between the old and new covenants? What role does the law play in the covenant? With whom were the covenants made? What does the book of Hebrews mean by a “better covenant”? (*See Heb. 8:6.*) What relation is there between the covenant and the heavenly sanctuary?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 5.

## “Behold, the Days Are Coming . . .”

**Read** Jeremiah 31:31–34 and answer the following questions:

1. Who instigates the covenant?

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2. Whose law is being talked about here? What law is this?

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3. Which verses stress the relational aspect that God wants with His people?

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4. What act of God in behalf of His people forms the basis of that covenant relationship?

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It is clear: the *new covenant* is not so different from the *old covenant* made with Israel on Mount Sinai. In fact, the problem with the Sinai covenant was not that it was old or outmoded. The problem, instead, was that it was broken (see Jer. 31:32).

The answers to the above questions, all found in those four verses, prove that many facets of the “old covenant” remain in the new one. The “new covenant” is, in a sense, a “renewed covenant.” It is the completion, or the fulfillment, of the first one.

**Focus** on the last part of Jeremiah 31:34, in which the Lord says that He will forgive their iniquity and the sin of His people. Even though the Lord says that He will write the law on our hearts and place it within us, He still stresses that He will forgive our sin and iniquity, which violates the law written in our hearts. Do you see any contradiction or tension between these ideas? If not, why not? What does it mean, as Romans 2:15 puts it, to have the law written within our hearts? (See Matt. 5:17–28.)

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Looking at the verses for today, how could you use them to answer the argument that somehow the Ten Commandments (or, specifically, the Sabbath) are now made void under the new covenant? Is there anything at all in those texts that makes that point? On the contrary, how could one use those texts to prove the perpetuity of the law?

## Heart Work

At the time when the southern kingdom of Judah was about to end and the people were to be taken into Babylonian captivity, God announced through His prophet Jeremiah the “new covenant.” This is the first time this notion is expressed in the Bible. However, when the 10-tribe northern kingdom of Israel was about to be destroyed (some one hundred fifty years before the time of Jeremiah), the *idea* of another covenant was mentioned again, this time by Hosea (*Hos. 2:18–20*).

**Read** Hosea 2:18–20. Notice the parallel between what the Lord said there to His people and what He said in Jeremiah 31:31–34. What common imagery is used, and, again, what does it say about the basic meaning and nature of the covenant?

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At moments in history when God’s plans for His covenant people were hampered by their rebellion and unbelief, He sent prophets to proclaim that the covenant history with His faithful had not come to an end. No matter how unfaithful the people might have been, no matter the apostasy, rebellion, and disobedience among them, the Lord still proclaims His willingness to enter into a covenant relationship with all who are willing to repent, to obey, and to claim His promises.

**Look** up the following texts. Though they do not specifically mention a new covenant, what elements are found in them that reflect the principles behind the new covenant?

*Ezek. 11:19* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ezek. 18:31* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ezek. 36:26* \_\_\_\_\_

The Lord will provide “ ‘a heart to know that I am the LORD’ ” (*Jer. 24:7, RSV*). He will “ ‘take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh’ ” (*Ezek. 11:19, RSV*), and will give “ ‘a new heart’ ” and “ ‘a new spirit’ ” (*Ezek. 36:26, RSV*). He also says, “ ‘I will put My Spirit within you’ ” (*Ezek. 36:27, NASB*). This work of God is the foundation of the new covenant.

**If someone came to you and said, “I want a new heart, I want the law written in my heart, I want a heart to know the Lord—but I don’t know how to get it,” what would you say to this person?**

## Old and New Covenants

“ ‘And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’ ” (*Isa. 56:6, 7, RSV*).

Jeremiah states that the new covenant is to be made with “ ‘the house of Israel’ ” (*Jer. 31:33*). Does this mean, then, that only the literal seed of Abraham, Jews by blood and birth, are to receive the covenant promises?

No! In fact, that was not even true in Old Testament times. That the Hebrew nation as a whole had been given the covenant promises is, of course, correct. Yet, it was not done to the exclusion of anyone else. On the contrary, all, Jew or Gentile, were invited to partake of the promises, but they had to agree to enter into that covenant. It is certainly no different today.

**Read** the above texts in Isaiah. What conditions do they place on those who want to serve the Lord? Is there really any difference in what God asked of them and what He asks of us today? Explain your answer.

Though the new covenant is called “better” (see Wednesday’s study), there really is no difference in the basic elements that make up both the old and new covenants. It is the same God who offers salvation the same way, by grace (*Exod. 34:6, Rom. 3:24*); it is the same God who seeks a people who by faith will claim His promises of forgiveness (*Jer. 31:34, Heb. 8:12*); it is the same God who seeks to write the law into the hearts of those who will follow Him in a faith relationship (*Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10*), whether they be Jew or Gentile.

In the New Testament, the Jews, responding to the election of grace, received Jesus Christ and His gospel. For a time they were the heart of the church, the “remnant, chosen by grace” (*Rom. 11:5, RSV*), in contrast to those who were “hardened” (*Rom. 11:7, RSV*). At the same time, the Gentiles, who formerly did not believe, accepted the gospel and were grafted into God’s true people, made up of believers, no matter the people or race to which they belonged (*Rom. 11:13–24*). So the Gentiles, “at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise” (*Eph. 2:12, RSV*), were brought near in the blood of Christ. Christ is mediating the “new covenant” (*Heb. 9:15, RSV*) for *all* believers, regardless of nationality or race.

## “A Better Covenant” (Heb. 8:6)

Yesterday we saw that regarding the basic elements, the old and new covenants were the same. The bottom line is salvation by faith in a God who will forgive our sins, not because of anything worthy in us but only because of His grace. As a result of this forgiveness, we enter into a relationship with Him in which we surrender to Him in faith and obedience.

Nevertheless, the book of Hebrews does call the new covenant “a better covenant.” How do we understand what that means? How is one covenant better than the other?

**Where** did the fault lie with the “failure” of the old covenant? (Heb. 8:7, 8).

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The problem with the old covenant was not with the covenant itself but with the failure of the people to grasp it in faith (Heb. 4:2). The superiority of the new to the old lies in the fact that Jesus—instead of being revealed only through the animal sacrifices (as in the old covenant)—now appears in the reality of His death and high-priestly ministry. In other words, the salvation offered in the old covenant is the same offered in the new. In the new, however, a greater, more complete revelation of the God of the covenant and the love that He has for fallen humanity has been revealed. It is better in that everything that had been taught through symbols and types in the Old Testament has found its fulfillment in Jesus, whose sinless life, His death, and high-priestly ministry were symbolized by the earthly sanctuary service (Heb. 9:8–14).

Now, though, instead of symbols, types, and examples, we have Jesus Himself, not only as the slain Lamb who shed His blood for our sin (Heb. 9:12) but also as the One who stands as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary ministering on our behalf (Heb. 7:25). Though the salvation He offers is the same, this fuller revelation of Himself and the salvation found in Him, as revealed in the new covenant, make it superior to the old.

**Read** Hebrews 8:5 and Hebrews 10:1. What word does the author use to describe the old covenant sanctuary services? How does the use of that word help us to understand the superiority of the new covenant?

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**Think about this:** Why would knowing about Christ’s life, death, and high-priestly ministry on our behalf give us a better understanding of God than one would get merely from the earthly sanctuary service ritual of animal sacrifices?

## The New Covenant Priest

The book of Hebrews places a heavy emphasis on Jesus as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. In fact, the clearest exposition of the new covenant found in the New Testament appears in the book of Hebrews with its emphasis on Christ as High Priest. This is no coincidence. Christ's heavenly ministry is intricately tied to the promises of the new covenant.

The Old Testament sanctuary service was the means by which the old covenant truths were taught. It centered on sacrifice and mediation. Animals were slain, and their blood was mediated by the priests. These, of course, were all symbols of the salvation found only in Jesus. There was no salvation found in them in and of themselves.

**Read Hebrews 10:4. Why is there no salvation found in the death of these animals? Why is the death of an animal not sufficient to bring salvation?**

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All these sacrifices and the priestly mediation that accompanied them met their fulfillment in Christ. Jesus became the Sacrifice upon which the blood of the new covenant is based. Christ's blood ratified the new covenant, making the Sinaitic covenant and its sacrifices "old," or void. The true sacrifice had been made, once and for all (*Heb. 9:26*). Once Christ died, there was no more need for any animals to be slain. The earthly sanctuary services had fulfilled their function.

**Read Matthew 27:51, which tells how the veil in the earthly sanctuary was torn when Jesus died. How does that event help us to understand that the earthly sanctuary had been superseded?**

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Tied, of course, to these animal sacrifices was the priestly ministry, those Levites who offered and mediated the sacrifices in the earthly sanctuary on behalf of the people. Once the sacrifices ended, the need for their ministry ended, as well. Everything had been fulfilled in Jesus, who now ministers His own blood in the sanctuary in heaven (*see Heb. 8:1–5*). Hebrews stresses Christ as High Priest in heaven, having entered by shedding His own blood (*Heb. 9:12*), mediating on our behalf. This is the foundation of the hope and promise we have in the new covenant.

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

**Further Thought:** “In partaking with His disciples of the bread and wine, Christ pledged Himself to them as their Redeemer. He committed to them the new covenant, by which all who receive Him become children of God, and joint heirs with Christ. By this covenant every blessing that heaven could bestow for this life and the life to come was theirs. This covenant deed was to be ratified with the blood of Christ. And the administration of the Sacrament was to keep before the disciples the infinite sacrifice made for each of them individually as a part of the great whole of fallen humanity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 659.

“The most striking feature of this covenant of peace is the exceeding richness of the pardoning mercy expressed to the sinner if he repents and turns from his sin. The Holy Spirit describes the gospel as salvation through the tender mercies of our God. ‘I will be merciful to their unrighteousness,’ the Lord declares of those who repent, ‘and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more’ (*Heb. 8:12*). Does God turn from justice in showing mercy to the sinner? No; God cannot dishonor His law by suffering it to be transgressed with impunity. Under the new covenant, perfect obedience is the condition of life. If the sinner repents and confesses his sins, he will find pardon. By Christ’s sacrifice in his behalf, forgiveness is secured for him. Christ has satisfied the demands of the law for every repentant, believing sinner.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 138.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is the advantage of having the law written in the heart rather than on tablets of stone alone? Which is easier to forget, the law written on stones or the law written in the heart?
- 2 Ever since the fall of humanity, salvation has been found only through Jesus, even if the revelation of that truth varied in different epochs of history. Do not the covenants work the same way?
- 3 Look at the second Ellen G. White quote in today’s study. What does she mean by “perfect obedience” as the requirement for a covenant relationship? Who is the only One who has rendered “perfect obedience”? How does that obedience answer the demands of the law for us?

**Summary:** The new covenant is a greater, more complete, and better revelation of the plan of redemption. We who partake of it partake of it by faith, a faith that will manifest itself in obedience to a law written in our hearts.



## A Church for Tourists

By ANDREW McCHESNEY, Adventist Mission

The new pastor was shocked when he showed up at the Bucharest International Seventh-day Adventist Church—the only English-speaking church in Romania’s capital—and found only three people present. All three were Romanians.

Three weeks later, Pastor Benjamin Stan learned that one of those three, a 21-year-old woman, was leaving. He wondered why God had led him to a dead church. “Why am I here?” he prayed. “Why did You give me this call?”

At that moment, two American tourists walked in the door. Benjamin realized that tourists need a place to worship. He kept praying.

A couple weeks later, he found a man dressed in a suit and tie waiting outside the church. The man lived with his family in Poland and worked in Romania. He belonged to another Christian church but, after studying the Bible, wanted a Sabbath-keeping church. Benjamin realized that there are foreigners who work in Romania but don’t speak Romanian. They need a place to worship.

After several months, Benjamin suggested holding Sabbath School and the divine worship service on Sabbath mornings. Until then, the church didn’t have a Sabbath School, and its hour-long worship service took place on Sabbath evenings. The two members opposed the proposal. They went to Romanian churches on Sabbath mornings and didn’t want to lose those friends. But Benjamin was insistent. “We do not come here to study English,” he said. “We come here to study the Bible. We need to be a church.”

Visiting other churches, Benjamin invited two teens and a man of about 30 to help organize the worship program. He advertised the new morning worship schedule on social media. That first Sabbath, 32 people showed up.

“You should have seen the expressions on the faces of the two members when they arrived,” Benjamin recalled. “Their eyes were big. They were surprised when they saw so many people, especially young people, in the church.”

The Polish man was baptized several weeks later.

Today, Benjamin has no doubt that the church, started by Pastor Adrian Bocaneanu in 2010, serves an important role in Bucharest. It has 26 members, and weekly attendance ranges from 30 to 50 people, including tourists, foreign workers, and international students.



What happened to those three people who attended the church on Benjamin’s first Sabbath? They are now very involved, including the young woman who left. She is now a church leader.

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*Connect with the Bucharest International Seventh-day Adventist Church at [facebook.com/englishadventist](https://facebook.com/englishadventist).*

**Study Focus:** *Jeremiah 31:31, RSV*

## ***Part I: Overview***

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The original premise of the “covenant” has not changed through time. Each time the covenant has been offered, however, humanity, with its fallen, sinful nature, has broken the contract. But God has not given up on us. He still offers us salvation if we choose to accept it.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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Indeed, there was nothing wrong with the old covenant; it failed because ancient Israel had failed repeatedly to abide by its conditions. Unfortunately, a callous form of worship called ritualism barricaded Israel’s heart. The problem was always from the human end, not God’s. That’s how it always has been and still is now.

**“Behold, the Days Are Coming . . .”**

It was from this context that Jeremiah, the prophet of moaning, had been Spirit-led to lay the groundwork of the new covenant’s provisions and functionality. The divine law was to become etched in the cathedral of the heart. A new-covenant Priest would become inaugurated above, and He would function instead of the Levitical priesthood. The earthly sanctuary services would become swallowed up in the Messianic and redemptive activity of a better covenant.

### **Heart Work**

Through the aegis of the new covenant, Christ, the Rock of Ages, desperately desired to remove Israel’s stony heart of lip-service religion: “I will give them one heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove the heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh, that they may follow My laws and faithfully observe My rules. Then they shall be My people and I will be their God.”—Harry M. Orlinsky, H. L. Ginsberg, Ephraim A. Speiser, eds., *Tanakh, the Holy Scriptures. The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985), p. 906. (*See Ezek. 11:19, 20.*)

The Messiah had drawn a sharp contrast between mouth religion and heart religion. Could this be, perhaps, the reason that Christ chided a defiant ecclesiastical leadership bathed in callous formalism? “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, saying: ‘This people draws near

to Me with their *mouth*, and with their lips honor Me; but their *heart* is far from Me. But in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the ordinances of men.’ And calling near the crowd, He said to them, Hear and understand.”—*The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*, vol. 4, p. 44; emphasis supplied. (See *Matt. 15:7–10*.)

### Old and New Covenants

The Sinaitic covenant was not a covenant of works. In Exodus 5:22, 23, Moses’ question was posed in the form of a unique cosmic inquiry, which sought out the power, qualities, and character of Yahweh. God’s answer revealed the meaning of His name, rather than a title or designation (see *Exod. 6:1–8*). Yahweh’s name points to a *relationship*. To know the meaning of the Lord is to know what He can do for Israel. They had heard the name *Yahweh*, but they did not show faith in trusting what He could do for them as their God.

In Exodus, the covenant was based on two possible motivations. The first related to whether Israel, out of its own strength, would do what God had spoken. The second related to whether Israel would obey the covenant obligations by faith through the empowering grace mercifully provided by the supernal I AM.

*Dispensationalism* also limits the time of the covenant of grace. It divides Bible history into *seven* periods and teaches that God works differently in each of these periods. A *dispensation* is a period of time during which humankind is tested in respect to some specific revelation of God’s will. Each dispensation ends with divine judgment. Thus, there is dispensation of the law and a dispensation of grace among dispensations. Thus, those who hold tenaciously to this view vainly attempt to divide the biblical harmony between the law and the gospel.

### A Better Covenant

“The new covenant functions better than the old covenant for God’s people. . . .

“In contrast with Israel’s old covenant, . . . Christ effects three basic promises of God: (1) *He internalizes* God’s moral law in the hearts of His people . . . ; (2) *He individualizes* the saving knowledge of God, so that each Israelite, without exception, has a personal, immediate relation with God (Hebrews 8:11); and (3) *He forgives* the sins of God’s people and “will remember their sins no more” (Hebrews 8:12). . . .

“According to Hebrews 8–12, the Church of Jesus represents the true fulfillment of Jeremiah’s predicted new covenant. Far from being an abrogation of Israel’s new covenant, it is rather a type and guarantee of the final consummation of the new covenant, when true Israelites of all ages will join the wedding supper of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem (Matthew 8:11, 12; 25:34; Revelation 19:9; 21:1–5).”—Hans K. LaRondelle, *Israel in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), pp. 114–121.

### The New Covenant Priest

As Aaron dedicated himself to the priesthood, so Christ presented Himself to the Father. As Moses anointed Aaron, God anointed Christ (*Lev. 8:30, Ps. 45:7*).

“Still bearing humanity, [H]e ascended to heaven, triumphant and victorious. He has taken the blood of [H]is atonement into the holiest of all, sprinkled it upon the mercy-seat and [H]is own garments, and blessed the people.”—Ellen G. White, in *The Youth’s Instructor*, July 25, 1901.

When Jesus was inaugurated, the Father gave Him the title of High Priest, for Paul noted that He was “called of God an high priest” (*Heb. 5:10; in Heb. 5:4, a word that indicates a “call” to the ministry*), just as the president of an institution of higher learning addresses or calls the graduate “Doctor” on his graduation!

“His blood-marked ear listens to the voice of His Father, and responds to the cry of His forlorn sheep, Spirit quickened. His hand[s], bloodied by the nails, work for His Father’s kingdom, Spirit directed. His torn feet leave crimson footsteps so we can trace our way to glory, Spirit lighted.”—Leslie Hardinge, *With Jesus in His Sanctuary: A Walk Through the Tabernacle Along His Way* (Harrisburg, PA: American Cassette Ministries, Book Division, 1991), p. 343.

## *Part III: Life Application*

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**For Reflection:** However much ancient Israel, particularly at the time of Christ, lapsed into legalism, the religion given by Yahweh was never legalistic. From Eden onward, it was always presented as grace: God’s grace, offered to those who would accept it and the terms of it. By choosing to accept God’s grace, and surrendering to it, people entered into a covenant *relationship* with God.

- 1. Because of human tendency, Israel was continually breaking its relationship with God. So, how did the Cross reshape the old covenant to be a “better” covenant? What were the advantages of the new covenant over the old? Explain how there could be a danger of taking grace for granted under the new covenant.**

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2. Considering the tendency of people to break their end of the bargain continually, why do you think history shows God approaching humanity again and again in an attempt to enter into a covenant relationship with us? What does such persistence tell us about God's love for us?

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3. Why should we, today, with the knowledge of Christ, and of His sacrifice, be more faithful to God than were the people of old? That is, because we have the amazing revelation of God's character as revealed in Jesus, which they didn't have (at least as clearly as we have), why should we be even more faithful than they were? Discuss this idea in class.

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4. Some people may ask, "How do you know that access to God depends not on achievement or obedience but simply on accepting God's gift of grace and loving favor"? What examples could you use

**from your own life to answer their question? How important are our life stories in the actualization of the new covenant?**

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- 5. Why was it so hard for people to accept the new covenant when Jesus presented it originally? Is it easier or harder for people to accept it today? Explain.**

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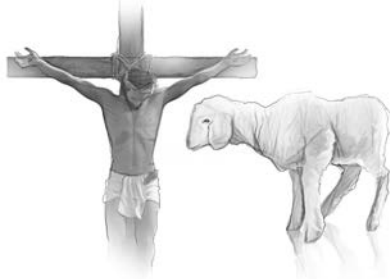
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# New Covenant Sanctuary



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Exod. 25:8; Isa. 53:4–12; Heb. 10:4; Heb. 9:14; Heb. 8:1–6; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (*Hebrews 9:15, RSV*).

A moonless evening, the sky, black like spilled ink, covered Frank in shadow as he walked the empty urban streets. After a while, he heard footsteps behind him, someone following in the darkness. Then the person caught up with him and said, “Frank, the printer?”

“Yes, I am he. But how did you know?”

“Well,” answered the stranger, “I don’t know you. But I know your brother very well, and even in the darkness, your mannerisms, your way of walking, your figure, all reminded me so much of him I just assumed that you were his brother, because he told me that he had one.”

This story reveals a powerful truth regarding the Israelite sanctuary service. It was, the Bible says, a shadow of the real. Nevertheless, there was enough in the shadows and images of the earthly sanctuary to clearly foreshadow and reveal the truths they were supposed to represent: the death and high-priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why did God want the Israelites to build a sanctuary? What does the sanctuary teach us about Christ as our Substitute? What does Jesus do in heaven as our Representative?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 12.

## Relationships

**“And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people”** (*Lev. 26:11, 12*).

One point should be clear by now: whether in the *old* covenant or *new* covenant, the Lord seeks a close, loving relationship with His people. In fact, the covenants basically help form (for lack of a better word) the “rules” for that relationship.

Relationship is crucial to the covenant, in whatever time or context. Yet, for a relationship to exist, there needs to be interaction, communication, and contact, particularly for sinful, fallible, doubting humans. The Lord, of course, knowing this, took the initiative to be sure that He would manifest Himself to us so that—within the confines of fallen humanity—we could relate to Him in a meaningful way.

**Read** Exodus 25:8, the Lord’s command to Israel to build a sanctuary. What reasons does the Lord give for wanting them to do this?

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The answer to this question, of course, brings up another question, and that is *Why*? Why does the Lord want to dwell in the midst of His people?

Perhaps, the truth could be found in the two verses for today, listed above. Notice, the Lord will “tabernacle” (or “dwell”) among them; He then says that He will not “abhor” them. He also says that He will “walk” among them and will be their God, and they will be His people (*Lev. 26:11, 12*). Look at the elements found in these verses. Again, the relational aspect comes through very clearly.

**Take** a few minutes: analyze Leviticus 26:11, 12 and Exodus 25:8. Write down how the various elements all fit in with the notion that the Lord seeks a relationship with His people.

Focus specifically on the words, “my soul shall not abhor you.” What is it about the sanctuary itself that provides the means by which fallen, sinful people can be accepted by the Lord, and why is that so important for the process of forming a covenant?

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## Sin, Sacrifice, and Acceptance (Heb. 9:22)

The divinely appointed way for the Old Testament sinners to rid themselves of sin and guilt was through animal sacrifices. The Israelite sacrificial offerings are detailed in Leviticus 1 through 7. Careful attention was paid to the use and disposal of the blood in the various kinds of sacrifices. Indeed, the role of blood in sacrificial rituals is one of the unifying features in the Israelite sacrifices.

The person who had sinned—and thus had broken the covenant relationship and the law that regulated it—could be restored to full fellowship with God and humanity by bringing an animal sacrifice as a substitute. Sacrifices, with their rites, were the God-appointed means to bring about cleansing from sin and guilt. They were instituted to cleanse the sinner, transferring individual sin and guilt to the sanctuary by sprinkling blood and reinstating communion and full covenantal fellowship of the penitent with the personal God who is the saving Lord.

**How** do these concepts expressed above help us to understand the questions at the end of yesterday's study?

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**What** prophetic significance was there in the animal sacrifice? (See *Isa. 53:4–12, Heb. 10:4*.)

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The Old Testament animal sacrifices were the divinely ordained means for ridding the sinner of sin and guilt. They changed the sinner's status from that of guilty and worthy of death to that of forgiven and reestablished in the covenantal God-human relationship. But there was a sense in which the animal sacrifices were prophetic in nature. After all, no animal was an adequate substitute in atoning for humanity's sin and guilt. Paul states it in his own language: "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (*Heb. 10:4, RSV*). Thus, an animal sacrifice was meant to foreshadow the coming of the divine-human Servant of God, who would die a substitutionary death for the sins of the world. It is through this process that the sinner is forgiven and accepted by the Lord, and the basis of the covenant relationship is established.

**Put yourself in the position of someone who lived in Old Testament times, when animals were sacrificed at the sanctuary. Remembering, too, just how important livestock were to their economy, culture, and whole way of life, what lesson were these sacrifices supposed to teach them about the cost of sin?**

## The Substitution

**“Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father”** (*Gal. 1:4*).

There is no question: one of the key themes (if not *the* key theme) of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ died as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. This truth is the foundation of the entire plan of salvation. Any theology that denies the blood atonement of Christ denies the heart and soul of Christianity. A bloodless cross can save no one.

**Meditate** upon the text for today, and then answer these questions: **Did Jesus volunteer to die? For whom did He die? What would His death accomplish?**

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Substitution is the key to the entire plan of salvation. Because of our sins, we deserve to die. Out of His love for us, Christ “gave himself for our sins” (*Gal. 1:4*). He died the death that we deserve. The death of Christ as the Substitute for sinners is the great truth from which all other truth flows. Our hope, that of restoration, of freedom, of forgiveness, of eternal life in Paradise, rests upon the work that Jesus did, that of giving Himself for our sins. Without that, our faith would be meaningless. We might as well place our hope and trust in a statue of a fish. Salvation comes only through the blood, the blood of Christ.

**Look** up the following texts: **Matthew 26:28, Ephesians 2:13, Hebrews 9:14, and 1 Peter 1:19.** **What do they tell us about the blood? What role, then, does blood play in the plan of salvation?**

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“It is not God’s will that you should be distrustful, and torture your soul with the fear that God will not accept you because you are sinful and unworthy. . . . You can say: ‘I know I am a sinner, and that is the reason I need a Saviour. . . . I have no merit or goodness whereby I may claim salvation, but I present before God the all-atoning blood of the spotless Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is my only plea.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 100.

**Dwell upon the Ellen White statement given above. Rewrite it in your own words. Make it personal. Put your own fears and pain in there, and then write down what the promises contained there give to you. What hope do you have because of the blood of the new covenant?**

## The New Covenant High Priest

The earthly sanctuary, where God chose to dwell with His people, centered on the sacrifice of the animals. Yet, the service did not end with the death of these creatures. The priest ministered the blood in the sanctuary on behalf of the sinner *after the sacrifice itself was killed*.

This whole service, however, was only a shadow, a symbol, of what Christ would do for the world. Thus, just as the symbols (the sanctuary service) did not end with the death of the animal, Christ's work for us did not end with His death on the cross, either.

**Study** for today Hebrews 8:1–6. Pray over the verses. Ask the Lord to help you understand what is being said here and why it is important for us to know it. After you are done, write down in your own words what you think the Lord's message is to us in these verses. Ask yourself: How do these texts help us understand the new covenant?

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Just as there was an earthly sanctuary, priesthood, and ministry under the old covenant, so there is a heavenly sanctuary, a heavenly priesthood, and heavenly ministry under the new covenant. However, what were only symbols, images, and a shadow (*Heb. 8:5*) in the old covenant became a reality in the new.

Also, rather than an amoral animal as our substitute, we have the sinless Jesus; rather than animal blood, we have the blood of Christ; rather than a man-made sanctuary, we have the "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man" (*Heb. 8:2*); and rather than a sinful, erring human priest, we have Jesus as our High Priest ministering in our behalf. With all this in mind, think about Paul's words: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great [a] salvation . . . ?" (*Heb. 2:3*).

**Think about it:** Jesus lived a sinless life on your behalf, died on your behalf, and is now in heaven, ministering in the sanctuary on your behalf. All this was done in order to save you from the terrible, final results of sin. Plan in the next day or so to talk to someone about this wonderful news, someone who you think needs to hear it. Work out beforehand, based on today's study, what you will say.

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## Heavenly Ministry (Heb. 9:24)

Study Hebrews 9:24, particularly the context in which it is given, that of explaining Christ's ministry in heaven for us after His sacrificial death on our behalf. Though much can be said, we want to focus on one point: the phrase at the end, which says that Christ now appears in the presence of God for us.

Think about what that means. We, sinful, fallen humanity; we, who would be consumed by the brightness of God's glory if we faced it now; we, no matter how bad we have been or how blatantly we have violated God's holy law, have Someone who appears in the presence of God *for us*. We have a Representative standing before the Father on our behalf. Think of how loving, forgiving, and accepting Christ was when here on earth. *This same Person is now our Mediator in heaven!*

This is the other part of the good news. Not only did Jesus pay the penalty for our sins, having taken them upon Himself at the cross (1 Pet. 2:24), but now He also stands in the presence of God, a Mediator between heaven and earth, between humanity and Divinity.

This makes perfect sense. Jesus, as both God and Man (a sinless, perfect Man) is the only One who could bridge the gap caused by sin between humanity and God. The crucial point to remember in all this (though there are many) is that there is now a Man, a human being, who can relate to all our trials, pains, and temptations (Heb. 4:14, 15), representing us before the Father.

**“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5, 6).**

**What two roles does this text put Jesus in, and how were these roles prefigured in the earthly sanctuary service?**

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The great news of the new covenant is that now, because of Jesus, repentant sinners have Someone representing them in heaven before the Father, Someone who earned for them what they could never earn for themselves, and that is perfect righteousness, the only righteousness that can stand in the presence of God. Jesus, with that perfect righteousness wrought out in His life through suffering (Heb. 2:10), stands before God, claiming for us forgiveness from sin and power over sin, because without these we would have no hope, not now and certainly not in the judgment.

**Pray and meditate over the idea of a human being, Someone who has experienced temptation to sin, standing before God in heaven. What does that mean to you personally? What kind of hope and encouragement does that bring?**

**Further Thought:** “The highest angel in heaven had not the power to pay the ransom for one lost soul. Cherubim and seraphim have only the glory with which they are endowed by the Creator as His creatures, and the reconciliation of man to God could be accomplished only through a mediator who was equal with God, possessed of attributes that would dignify, and declare him worthy to treat with the infinite God in man’s behalf, and also represent God to a fallen world. Man’s substitute and surety must have man’s nature, a connection with the human family whom he was to represent, and, as God’s ambassador, he must partake of the divine nature, have a connection with the Infinite, in order to manifest God to the world, and be a mediator between God and man.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 257.

“Jesus continues: As you confess Me before men, so I will confess you before God and the holy angels. You are to be My witnesses upon earth, channels through which My grace can flow for the healing of the world. So I will be your representative in heaven. The Father beholds not your faulty character, but He sees you as clothed in My perfection. I am the medium through which Heaven’s blessings shall come to you. And everyone who confesses Me by sharing My sacrifice for the lost shall be confessed as a sharer in the glory and joy of the redeemed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 357.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read Romans 5:2, Ephesians 2:18, and Ephesians 3:12. What are they saying that helps us understand our access to the Father through Jesus?
- 2 Look at the second Ellen G. White statement given above. Notice how she explains the role of mediator. When the Father looks at us, He does not see our faulty character but Christ’s perfection instead. Dwell on what that means, and discuss it with the class.
- 3 Looking at what we have studied this week, ask yourself how you would answer this question: “OK, so Christ is in the sanctuary in heaven. So what? What does that mean on a daily, practical level?”

**Summary:** The old covenant sacrificial system was replaced by the new; instead of animals being sacrificed by sinful priests in an earthly sanctuary, we now have Jesus, our perfect Sacrifice. He represents us before the Father in the sanctuary in heaven, which forms the basis of the new covenant and its promises.

## Boy Revives Dying Church

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

A Seventh-day Adventist church elder asked Alejandro to preach his first evangelistic series at the age of eight. “We want to plant seeds, not to harvest,” the elder told Alejandro’s mother.

The church was dying on Tierra Bomba, an island off Colombia’s coast in the Caribbean Sea. Its head elder had resigned from the pulpit and left the church on the last day of the evangelistic meetings that he was leading. Church members were discouraged, and many had stopped worshipping on Sabbath.

Alejandro, who had preached since he was four, was scared to speak at the first meeting. But Mother gave him a big hug, and they prayed together.

People packed the yard of a church member’s house to hear the boy speak.

Hoping to disrupt the weeklong meetings, the former head elder organized his own meetings in his home across the street from Alejandro’s site. He invited current and former church members to attend his daily meetings.

People walking to his house saw the boy speaking as they passed by and stopped. “Who is the child preacher?” they wondered. Many stayed to listen.

The former elder was upset to see people going to Alejandro’s meeting, and he marched over to demand that they come to his house.

“Come on!” he told people, grabbing them by the arm. “Let’s go!”

Some people went with him, but when he wasn’t paying attention, they snuck back to listen to Alejandro preach.

This went on for several days. Then church members invited the former elder to the evangelistic meetings—and he came.

As part of the meetings, Alejandro visited homes of people who had responded to his appeals for baptism. During the first round of visitations, three people confirmed their desire for baptism. During a second round, an unmarried couple asked for baptism. Alejandro’s mother helped them complete the paperwork so they could be married. A total of seven people were baptized at the end of the weeklong meetings.

Alejandro left Tierra Bomba happy. The church members also were happy. The church was strong and growing.

“Jesus triumphed,” Alejandro said.



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*Alejandro, a 10-year-old child preacher in Cartagena, Colombia, has led 18 people, including his parents and older brother, to baptism since he was four. Read more in this quarter’s Children’s Mission, downloadable at [bit.ly/childrensmision](http://bit.ly/childrensmision). This quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a Better Life center to train missionaries at Colombia Adventist University in Alejandro’s homeland, Colombia.*

**Study Focus:** *Hebrews 9:15, RSV*

## ***Part I: Overview***

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The earthly sanctuary symbolizes the work of salvation that still goes on today. Christ stands in the role of our High Priest, mediating before God in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. His purity stands worthy before God in place of our unworthy sinful natures.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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Through the sanctuary system, Israel's new relationship with Yahweh was indicative of how Calvary would become a crimson cushion of grace that would counterbalance the stealthy intrusion of human sin. This new relationship would center in blood-sprinkled ceremonial rituals, which became the redemptive portal out of which self could be snatched off its throne and crucified. This is the plan of salvation.

### **Relationships**

When Christ died on the cross, sin was conquered in our behalf. For us, then, to live in that victory we must die, in a sense, as well. Dead to self and alive to God. When called by God to Christ, we really are called to "come and die."

Of course, dying is deemed bad, but in this case, it's death to all that is bad in our souls and characters, all that would keep us from a close covenantal relationship with Jesus.

We could say, then, that every sacrifice offered in the sanctuary service pointed to death. Yes, of course, it was Christ's death for us. But by participating in that ritual, the penitent sinner accepted the sacrifice in his behalf and implicit in that was his acceptance of the covenantal promises offered by God to His people. And that covenantal promise, too, included the necessary death to self that repentance and sorrow for sin implied. All this is revealed, at least reflected, in the sanctuary service, whose fuller meaning was seen in the New Testament and in the new covenant.

### **Sin, Sacrifice, and Acceptance**

"The sinner then tied the animal's front legs, and placing a slip-knot around its back legs drew all four together. Thus secured, the creature fell on its side, and its face was turned toward the most holy place.

"The worshiper next 'put' 'both' his hands . . . upon its head to signal

the transference of his sins to his representative. The verb pictures his leaning his entire weight upon the creature. . . .

“With hands pressing his guilt upon the victim’s head, and face turned toward the most holy place, the penitent silently confessed his sins to God, and pledged amendment in the ancient Hebrew prayer which concluded with the words, ‘I return in repentance, and let this be for my atonement [literally, covering].’ . . .

“The sinner then grasped the knife and deliberately slit his victim’s throat (Lev 1:5, 11). By this personal act he acknowledged that his sin was the cause of his proxy’s death. . . . His compliance in the rite showed that he had accepted the claim of God’s unchangeable law, agreed that death was the result of his transgression, and affirmed that his only escape was through the vicarious death of the One Who would take his place.”—Leslie Hardinge, *With Jesus in His Sanctuary: A Walk Through the Tabernacle Along His Way*, pp. 371, 372.

### **The Substitution**

“Christ is our righteous substitute.

“The plan to send a second Adam, a substitute, was not formulated at the time of the first transgression. It was a provision ‘foreordained before the foundation of the world’ (1 Peter 1:20).

“The Substitute was to succeed where Adam had failed. He was to prove that Adam did not have to sin, that Adam could have prevailed over temptation, that the commandments are both possible to obey and profitable for the human race. . . .

“Adam fell in a perfect Eden—Jesus succeeded in a wicked Nazareth. Bearing the burdens of His Father’s honor and His people’s redemption, Christ fought the battle of sin in our inadequate armor, these weak human bodies.

“And He won! *The Lamb prevailed!*”—Calvin Rock, *Seeing Christ: Windows on His Saving Grace* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 65–67.

### **New Covenant High Priest**

“When one speaks of Christ as a . . . high priest it is not inappropriate to add that He is our only priest. He has an exclusive relationship to God: He and no other can represent us. The priests of OT times served as types of the coming true Priest. The apostles and ministers of NT times are never called priests, nor do they perform the functions of priests. There is but one Mediator between God and men.

“The first major function of a priest was to offer sacrifices, ‘to make expiation for the sins of the people’ (Heb 2:17). . . . The one perfect Sacrifice that [God] offered was Himself.

“His offering of Himself was a voluntary act. He lay down His life of His own free will . . . (Jn 10:18). He became ‘the Lamb of God, who



takes away the sin of the world!’ (Jn 1:29), a lamb ‘without blemish or spot’ (1 Pe 1:19). He made Himself ‘an offering for sin’ (Is 53:10). . . .

“Christ then occupied the double role of offerer and offering, of priest and oblation. This sacrificial offering of Himself as a victim upon the altar was a single once-for-all act ‘for all time’ (Heb 10:10, 12; 9:26).”—Walter F. Specht, “Christ’s Session, Enthronement, and Mediatorial and Intercessory Ministry,” *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies*, eds. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshar (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1981), pp. 344, 345.

### Heavenly Ministry

“In the epistle to the Hebrews, in particular, the writer is trying to turn the eyes of the Jewish Christians away from the ministry in the earthly sanctuary/temple to a heavenly sanctuary with a more perfect ministry by their own resurrected and ascended Lord and Saviour.”—Arnold V. Wallenkampf, “A Brief Review of Some of the Internal and External Challengers to the Seventh-day Adventist Teachings on the Sanctuary and the Atonement,” *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, p. 582.

## Part III: Life Application

**For Reflection:** It’s amazing how graphically and unambiguously the New Testament, particularly the book of Hebrews (and even Revelation), teaches about the heavenly sanctuary and its central place in the plan of salvation. It is, in a sense, the plan of salvation, the gospel, and covenant writ large. One cannot truly understand what the covenant is all about apart from some knowledge of the sanctuary service and what it means.

1. Using Hebrews 8, encourage your class to discover the following points regarding the Mediator:
  - A. Position of the Mediator (*Heb. 8:1, 2*)
  - B. Performance of the Mediator (*Heb. 8:3–6*)
  - C. Promise of the Mediator (*Heb. 8:6–9*)
  - D. Productions of the Mediator (*Heb. 8:10–12*)

For each point, have them identify the difference between the old and the new covenants.

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2. How specifically does Christ make the new covenant more realistic in your life? How different would your life be if the new covenant did not exist?

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3. A promise is as good as the person making it. When God makes a promise, it is even more solid than historical facts. Why, then, is it easier to question God's will than it is to blindly go where He leads? What lessons can we learn from biblical characters who chose to question rather than obey?

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4. Hebrews 8:10 says that Christ the Mediator places God's law in our hearts. How is this act part of our spiritual experience? Explain how our having God's law in our hearts enables us to know Him more intimately.

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5. Through Christ, the new covenant supersedes the old covenant. Through Christ, God's law is draped with grace and love. Why, then, do we let legalism get in the way of our spiritual growth? Based on the new covenant, what specific things can you do to develop or strengthen your relationship with God but without the stranglehold of legalism?

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6. Although the New Testament instructs us that the animal sacrifices, et cetera, of the Old Testament period were not effective in erasing sin, it is clear that they were effective in enabling an individual to continue in fellowship with God's people. Why would they have been effective in this way, though they did not possess any intrinsic power? What does this teach us about the power and importance of rituals?

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7. The idea of an atonement is central to the New Testament. Why might it be necessary for an innocent Being to die in order for a guilty person to be rescued from the consequences of sin? How might the death of this innocent Person accomplish this atonement? Is it strictly a legal transaction? Explain.

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8. At present, Jesus represents us before God because we are incapable of facing God ourselves, much less defending ourselves in front of Him. Does this suggest that at some future point we may be capable of appearing before God without a Mediator? Why, or why not? What are the various views on this idea? What would it mean to stand before God without a Mediator?

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# Covenant Faith



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Gal. 6:14; Rom. 6:23; 1 John 5:11, 13; Rom. 4:1–7; Lev. 7:18; Lev. 17:1–4; Rom. 5:1.*

**Memory Text:** “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith” (*Galatians 3:11*).

About seven centuries before Christ, the poet Homer wrote *The Odyssey*, the story of Odysseus, the great warrior who—after sacking the city of Troy in the Trojan war—began a 10-year voyage to try to return to his native Ithaca. The voyage took so long because he faced shipwrecks, mutinies, storms, monsters, and other obstacles that kept him from reaching his goal. Finally, after deciding that Odysseus had suffered enough, the gods agreed to allow the weary warrior to return to his home and family. His trials were, they agreed, enough atonement for his mistakes.

In one sense, we are like Odysseus, on a long journey home. The crucial difference, however, is that unlike Odysseus, we can never “suffer enough” to earn our way back. The distance between heaven and earth is too great for us to atone for our mistakes. If we get home, it will have to be only by the grace of God.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why must salvation be a gift? Why could only Someone equal with God ransom our souls? What makes Abraham such a good representative of faith? What does it mean that righteousness is “imputed,” or “credited,” to us? How can we make the promises and hope found in the Cross our own?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 19.

## Reflections of Calvary

The Old Testament way of salvation under the Mosaic covenant is no different from the New Testament way of salvation under the new covenant. Whether in the Old or New Testament, old or new covenant, salvation is by faith alone. If it were by anything else, such as works, salvation would be something that was owed us, something the Creator was obligated to give us. Only those who do not understand the seriousness of sin could believe that God was under some obligation to save us. On the contrary, if anything, there was only one obligation, and that was what we owed to the violated law. We, of course, could not meet that obligation; fortunately, Jesus met it for us.

“When men and women can more fully comprehend the magnitude of the great sacrifice which was made by the Majesty of heaven in dying in man’s stead, then will the plan of salvation be magnified, and reflections of Calvary will awaken tender, sacred, and lively emotions in the Christian’s heart. Praises to God and the Lamb will be in their hearts and upon their lips. Pride and self-esteem cannot flourish in the hearts that keep fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary. . . . All the riches of the world are not of sufficient value to redeem one perishing soul. Who can measure the love Christ felt for a lost world as He hung upon the cross, suffering for the sins of guilty men? This love was immeasurable, infinite.

“Christ has shown that His love was stronger than death. He was accomplishing man’s salvation; and although He had the most fearful conflict with the powers of darkness, yet, amid it all, His love grew stronger and stronger. He endured the hiding of His Father’s countenance, until He was led to exclaim in the bitterness of His soul: ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ His arm brought salvation. The price was paid to purchase the redemption of man, when, in the last soul struggle, the blessed words were uttered which seemed to resound through creation: ‘It is finished.’

“The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. That Christ, so excellent, so innocent, should suffer such a painful death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, our thoughts and imaginations can never fully comprehend. The length, the breadth, the height, the depth, of such amazing love we cannot fathom. The contemplation of the matchless depths of a Saviour’s love should fill the mind, touch and melt the soul, refine and elevate the affections, and completely transform the whole character.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 213.

**Pray over what Ellen G. White wrote here. Keeping these lines in mind, read Galatians 6:14 and then ask yourself, In what ways can I glory in the cross of Christ?**

## The Covenant and the Sacrifice

**“You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19, RSV).**

**What** does Peter mean here when he says that we were ransomed?

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When Peter speaks about Christ’s atoning death on the cross, the “ransom” or price idea to which he refers brings to mind the ancient practice of a slave’s being freed from bondage after a price had been paid (often by a relative). In contrast, Christ ransomed us from the slavery of sin and its final fruit, which is death, but He did it with His “precious blood,” His substitutionary and voluntary death on Calvary. Again, this is the foundation of all the covenants: without it, the covenant becomes null and void, because God could not have justly fulfilled His end of the deal, which is the gift of eternal life bestowed upon all who believe.

**Look** up the following verses: Romans 6:23 and 1 John 5:11, 13. What message do they share?

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We have this promise of eternal life, because Jesus alone could repair the breach that first caused us to lose that eternal life. How? Because the righteousness and infinite value of the Creator alone could cancel the debt we owed to the broken law—that is how wide the breach caused by sin was. After all, what would it say about the seriousness of God’s eternal moral law if some finite, temporal, and created being could pay the penalty for violating it? Only Someone who is equal to God Himself, in whom life exists unborrowed and underived and eternal, could have paid the ransom required to free us from the debt owed to the law. This is how all the covenant promises are fulfilled; this is how we have the promise of eternal life, even now; this is how we have been ransomed from sin and death.

**Imagine that in an art museum, someone’s child throws a balloon filled with ink at a Rembrandt painting and ruins it completely. The painting is worth millions; the parents could not come close to paying the debt owed, even if they sold everything they owned. In what sense does this image help us understand just how serious a breach sin has caused, how helpless we are to fix it, and why only the Lord Himself could pay the debt?**

## The Faith of Abraham: Part 1

**“He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).**

This verse remains one of the most profound statements in all Scripture. It helps establish the crucial truth of biblical religion, that of justification by faith alone, and it does this long centuries before Paul wrote about it in Romans—all of which helps prove the point that from Eden onward, salvation always came the same way.

The immediate context of the verse helps us understand just how great Abram’s faith was, believing in God’s promise of a son despite all the physical evidence that would seem to make that promise impossible. It is the kind of faith that realizes its own utter helplessness, the kind of faith that demands a complete surrender of self, the kind of faith that requires a total submission to the Lord, the kind of faith that results in obedience. This was the faith of Abram, and it was counted to him “as righteousness.”

**Why** does the Bible say that it was “counted to” him, or “credited to” him, as righteousness? Was Abram himself “righteous” in the sense of God’s righteousness? What did he do, not long after God declared him righteous, that helps us understand why this righteousness was credited to him, as opposed to what he himself actually was?

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However much Abram’s life was a life of faith and obedience, it was not a life of perfect faith and perfect obedience. At times he displayed weakness in both areas. (Does that sound like anyone you know?) All of which leads to the crucial point, and that is: the righteousness that saves us is a righteousness that is credited to us, a righteousness that is (to use a fancy theological term) *imputed* to us. This means that we are declared righteous in the sight of God, despite our faults; it means that the God of heaven views us as righteous even if we are not. This is how He saw Abram, and this is how He will see all who come to Him in “the faith of Abraham” (*Rom. 4:16*).

**Read Romans 4:1–7. Look at the context in which Paul uses Genesis 15:6. Pray over those verses, and write out in your own words what you believe they are saying to you.**

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## The Faith of Abraham: Part 2

Looking again at Genesis 15:6, we can see that various translations have rendered the term as “counted” (Hebrew, *chashab*) or “reckoned” or “credited” (*RSV, NIV*) or “accounted.”

The same term is employed in other texts in the books of Moses. A person or a thing is “reckoned,” or “regarded,” as something that person or thing is not. For instance, in Genesis 31:15, Rachel and Leah affirm that their father “reckons” (“regards” or “counts”) them as strangers, although they are his daughters. The tithe of the Levite is “reckoned” (“regarded” or “counted”) as if it were the corn of the threshing floor, although it is obviously not the corn (*Num. 18:27, 30, NIV*).

**How** is the idea of reckoning expressed in the context of sacrifices? (*Lev. 7:18, Lev. 17:1–4*).

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The King James Version uses the word “imputed” to translate *chashab*. If a particular sacrifice (“peace offering”) is not eaten by the third day, its value is lost, and it shall not be “reckoned” (*Lev. 7:18, NASB*; Hebrew, *chashab*) to the benefit of the offerer. Leviticus 7:18 speaks of a situation in which a sacrifice is “reckoned” to the benefit of the sinner (*compare Lev. 17:1–4, NASB*), who then stands before God in righteousness. God is accounting the sinner as righteous, although the individual is actually unrighteous.

**Take** some time to dwell on this wonderful truth that despite our faults, we can be accounted, or credited, as righteous in the sight of God. Write out in your own words your understanding of what this means.

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This great truth, that of being declared righteous, not because of any act that we can do but only because of faith in what Christ has done for us, is the essence of the phrase “righteousness by faith.” Yet, it is not that our faith itself makes us righteous; rather, faith is the vehicle by which we obtain the gift of righteousness. This, in essence, is the beauty, the mystery, and the glory of Christianity. All that we believe as Christians, as followers of Christ, finds an important root in this wonderful concept. Through faith, we are accounted righteous in the sight of God. All else that follows—obedience, sanctification, holiness, character development, love—stems from this crucial truth.

**How do you respond to someone who seeks to be a Christian yet says, “But I don’t feel righteous”?**



## Resting on the Promises

There is a story told about the famous Cardinal Bellarmine, the great Catholic apologist who all his life fought the message of justification by an imputed righteousness alone. As he lay dying, he was brought the crucifixes and the merits of the saints to help give him assurance before death. But Bellarmine said, “Take it away. I think it’s safer to trust in the merits of Christ.”

As they near the end of their lives, many people look back and see how vain, how futile, how useless, their deeds and their works are for earning salvation with a holy God, and thus how much they need the righteousness of Christ.

Yet, the good news is that we don’t have to wait for the approach of death to have security in the Lord. The whole covenant is based on the secure promises of God now, promises for us now, promises that can make our lives better now.

**Look** up the following verses, and answer the question asked with each one in the context of developing, keeping, and strengthening your covenant relationship with God:

*Ps. 34:8* (How can you taste God’s goodness?)

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*Matt. 11:30* (What has Christ done for us that makes this yoke easy?)

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*Rom. 5:1* (What does justification have to do with peace?)

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*Phil. 2:7, 8* (What have you gained from Christ’s experience?)

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Prayerfully examine your life, and ask yourself, What things am I doing that are strengthening my relationship with God, and what things are hurting it? What changes do I need to make?

**Further Thought:** “The only way in which he [the sinner] can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account. Christ’s righteousness is accepted in place of man’s failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son. This is how faith is accounted righteousness; and the pardoned soul goes on from grace to grace, from light to greater light.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367.

“When through repentance and faith we accept Christ as our Savior, the Lord pardons our sins, and remits the penalty prescribed for the transgression of the law. The sinner then stands before God as a just person; he is taken into favor with Heaven and through the Spirit has fellowship with the Father and the Son.

“Then there is yet another work to be accomplished, and this is of a progressive nature. The soul is to be sanctified through the truth. And this also is accomplished through faith. For it is only by the grace of Christ, which we receive through faith, that the character can be transformed.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 191.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① What distinction is made between a living and a dead faith (*James 2:17, 18*)? How does Paul describe a living faith (*Rom. 16:26*)? What is the key word that helps reveal what faith entails?
- ② How do you respond to the argument (which comes with a certain logical consistency) that if we are saved only by a credited righteousness, not a righteousness that exists within us, then it does not matter what we do or how we act?
- ③ “Our acceptance with God is sure only through His beloved Son, and good works are but the result of the working of His sin-pardoning love. They are no credit to us, and we have nothing accorded to us for our good works by which we may claim a part in the salvation of our souls. . . . He [the believer] cannot present his good works as a plea for the salvation of his soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 199. Keeping this statement by Ellen G. White in mind, why, then, are good works such a crucial part of the Christian experience?

**Summary:** Old covenant, new covenant: Jesus paid the debt owed to the law, so that we can stand righteous in the sight of God.

## Weekly Trip to Mission Field

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Some children in the U.S. state of Texas don't just listen to the mission story. They also fly to faraway countries to experience the story firsthand.

On Sabbaths, the children check in at Missionary Airlines when they arrive for Sabbath School at the Grandview Seventh-day Adventist Church. Each child presents a passport—marked “Grandview Sabbath School Passport”—at the airline’s check-in desk to receive a visa for the destination country. On one Sabbath, a visitor from Adventist Mission had prepared a mission story from China, so the airline representative—primary teacher Luly Wicklund—stuck a home-printed sticker of the red Chinese flag into each passport. Each child also can receive up to three stars in the passport: for showing up on time, for bringing a Bible, and for inviting a friend.

The first 10 children who arrive on time are issued first-class boarding passes, which allows them to choose their seats in an airplane in the next room. Late arrivals receive economy boarding passes with assigned seating. The children also have frequent-flyer cards with memory verses on the back. The plane, constructed by church members, consists of a metal and wooden frame covered with white canvas. Oval windows line the sides of the fuselage.

Once the children are seated, Luly plays a recorded message. “Thank you for choosing Missionary Airlines, where a new adventure awaits you every Sabbath!” says the male voice of the plane’s captain. “Please remain in your seats as one of your attendants has prayer before our flight departs.”

After the announcement one Sabbath, Luly asked the 11 children onboard for their prayer requests. A boy pointed to a gaping hole at the back of the plane and exclaimed, “Let’s pray that we’re not sucked out of this plane during the flight.” After the other children laughed, the boy added seriously, “Please pray for my dog. She isn’t feeling well.” Then the plane took off for China.

Upon landing, the children exited the plane and sat in nearby chairs to listen to the mission story from China. Afterward, they flew back to Texas. During the return flight, the teacher asked quiz questions about the mission story.

Luly, who developed Missionary Airlines at the suggestion of her 11-year-old son more than a decade ago, said she has found it useful to develop a Sabbath School theme each quarter and to make mission stories part of that theme. Previous themes have included a submarine, a cave, and a rocket that took children around the world. Luly said the trips personalize the mission stories.



“Children see that these are normal people who go to these places,” she said—normal people used by God.

**Study Focus:** *Galatians 3:11****Part I: Overview***

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No matter what we do, our human nature is sinful and unworthy in comparison to the purity of God’s righteousness. By accepting Christ’s substitutionary death for us through the covenant, we can stand worthy in the sight of God. And however much God cleanses us, changes us, molds us into reflections of His image, we must always have Jesus as our perfect Substitute. This is the essence of the gospel and our great hope, our covenantal hope.

***Part II: Commentary***

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Before the new covenant could be ratified, blood had to be shed. Hence, as had been etched and foretold in the archives of Messianic prophecies, that life-giving blood, which streamed from Calvary, validated the new covenant.

**Reflections on Calvary**

We do need divine grace to cleanse us, to deliver us from our own presumptuousness, and to free us from the inherent sinfulness that, though all but wired into us, does not need to dominate us. And who doesn’t long to be freed from the petty jealousies, the envies, the bitterness and anger and guilt-causing deviousness inherent in us all? All this, and more, is what God will do for His covenant people, if they would but abide by the covenant and rest in Him and His promises.

“Their plight is serious indeed. They cannot cleanse themselves of sin (Prov. 20:9), and no deeds of law will ever enable them to stand before God justified (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16). Hence the atonement, to accomplish for sinners what needed to be done, had to be made by someone else in their behalf. Christ is utter self-giving, even in death. He is the means of our return to God. Through Him we have access to the Father (Eph. 2:18), an access to be appropriated by faith (Eph. 3:12), faith in Him ‘whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith’ (Rom. 3:25).”—Raoul Dederen, “Christ: His Person and Work,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), pp. 174, 175.

**The Faith of Abraham: Part 1**

How amazing that the Old Testament, often viewed as the ultimate example

of what legalism is all about, is really the foundational expression of the covenant promise of salvation by faith. Back in Genesis 15:6, we can see this in the famous verse: “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (*NKJV*). This, of course, in talking about Abram (not yet Abraham). The Hebrew is clear: Abram believed “in” the Lord; that is, he not only believed that He existed, but he also believed His promises, even the ones that seemed impossible, such as that he would one day father a great nation.

What about other promises of God that seem impossible? Such as that we, though sinners, can be accounted righteous, and even made righteous, in His sight? Talk about belief in the impossible!

### **The Faith of Abraham: Part 2**

“Faith eats her manna and leaves not a morsel for worms to breed in. . . .

“The faith of Abraham could lead strings of camels and flocks of sheep away from Haran to Canaan. His was the faith which could drive the tent-pin into a foreign soil, or roll up the canvas. . . .

“It is a practical, active, living, week-day, every-day faith. I will speak very broadly and plainly, and say we need a bread-and-cheese faith, . . . a faith which believes that God who feeds the ravens will send us our daily bread; a faith . . . that . . . does not live in the region of fiction.”—Charles Spurgeon, “Hearken and Look,” *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia*, vols. 1, 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 43, 47, 48. (*See Isa. 51:2.*)

### **Resting on the Promises**

“How can Divinity risk so much in behalf of humanity? How can God declare completeness (perfection) for people who, though in process, have not fully attained? How can He declare as accepted persons who by nature are unacceptable? How can the Godhead risk Their reputation by extending such daring grace?

“The answer is threefold.

“First, God does so because He accepts our sincere prayers and efforts toward spiritual maturity as perfection. . . .

“Second, Christ is able to take such action because the faith that He sees in us is not really ours; it is His. He sees His faith in us and honors that faith. It is ours in that we are the repositories of His love, the objects of His grace. But it is His because saving faith is of divine, not human, origin. . . .

“Third, God acts with such confidence because in the final analysis it is not on us that the Father focuses; it is on the righteousness of Christ’s robe that covers us.”—Calvin Rock, *Seeing Christ: Windows on His Saving Grace*, pp. 158, 159.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Reflection:** Are you saved? To answer this question, it is important to understand what salvation is. *Salvation* is a noun that suggests action. *To save* is the root, which is a verb. What action is involved in salvation?

Different faiths view salvation in different ways. The Baptists place salvation in the past. It is an event that took place at the cross. All sins were forgiven at that point. People who believe in predestination put salvation at the “Holy Council,” where certain people were appointed to be saved or lost. Roman Catholics place salvation in the future, after a person who dies believing in Jesus is purified in purgatory. These are punctiliar views of salvation, meaning that salvation takes place at one point in time.

Seventh-day Adventists, however, have a linear view of salvation. Salvation has a past, present, and a future. It is a process—a series of divine acts and human responses.

God knew from the beginning that Adam and Eve would reject Him. He created them with free will—the ability to choose between right and wrong. He assumed responsibility for rectifying the sin that they had brought. Jesus stepped forward and said, *I will experience the second death in their place.*

God established a covenant with His people and never changed the conditions of that covenant. All interactions between God and His people were established in the covenant. God illustrated the plan of salvation through the sanctuary services and, ultimately, through Jesus’ sacrifice.

The most significant contribution we can give to the world right now is to share with others who Jesus is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. He is not on holiday or taking a 15-minute break. Right now is the most pivotal point in our salvation.

What does salvation mean to you? What will your answer be when someone asks if you are saved?

- 1. Ask people in the class to respond to the question, *Are you saved?* Discuss the various answers and what they reveal about how we, as church members, understand the plan of salvation and how it works. Why do Adventists seem to struggle with that question?**

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- 2. Ellen G. White has said that God loves each of us as if each individual were the only human being alive. What does that teach us**

about God’s love? Dwell on the implications of this idea and why it is so hopeful.

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3. A fundamental thought of some of the people in Christ’s day was that a person must “earn” God’s favor. A fundamental thought of Christians is that all a person can do is take God at His word. Considering the difference between these two thoughts, why do you think Paul used Abraham as the greatest example of faith (*see Rom. 4:1–8*)?

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4. Thursday’s study tells us that when people review their life before they die, they see how vain and futile their deeds were in earning salvation. What are the elements of life that make us feel as though we have to depend on ourselves more than on anyone or anything else? What can we do to live a life that says “Jesus is in control”? How does your spiritual life reflect who/what is in control?

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5. “God does not give us up because of our sins. We may make mistakes and grieve His Spirit, but when we repent and come to Him with contrite hearts, He will not turn us away. There are hindrances to be removed. Wrong feelings have been cherished, and there have been pride, self-sufficiency, impatience, and murmurings. All these separate us from God. Sins must be confessed; there must be a deeper work of grace in the heart. Those who feel weak and discouraged may become strong men of God and do noble work for the Master.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 35. How can we learn to live by these words?

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6. We have all felt the rejection and pain of a broken promise. The Bible, however, is full of promises we can count on 100 percent. Yet, we are the ones who, in disobedience, step out of our covenant relationship. Having known the pain of broken relationships, what can we do to ensure we do not take for granted our covenant relationship with God?
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7. Jesus sacrificed Himself because we owed a debt we had no way of repaying. Why could God not simply forgive the debt? If God could not do this, does it mean that He is somehow subject to His own law?
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8. In 1 Peter 1:18, 19, the author writes that Christ's blood "ransomed" readers from "the futile ways inherited from [their] forefathers" (*ESV*). Was he writing strictly about redemption from future punishment? Or was he also referring to the impact of this fact on the lives that his readers were living currently? Discuss.
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9. Genesis 15:6 states that Abram's belief in the Lord was counted as righteousness. Today most people associate faith or belief with assent to a list of doctrines or propositions. Is this what is referred to here? Why, or why not? If not, what part do the "right" beliefs about God play in our relationship to God?
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# The New Covenant Life




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *1 John 1:4; John 5:24; Rom. 3:24, 25; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 4:16; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 20:6, 14; Rev. 21:8.*

**Memory Text:** “‘I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly’ ” (*John 10:10*).

**T**his quarter has been a study on the covenant, which (to pare it down to its simplest, purest form) is, basically, God saying, *This is how I will save you from sin, period.*

Though the outcome, the grand finale, of the covenant promise is, of course, eternal life in a world made new, we do not have to wait until that time to enjoy the covenant blessings today. The Lord cares about our lives *now*; He wants the best for us *now*. The covenant is not some deal where you do this and this and this and then, a long way off, you will get your reward. The rewards, the gifts—they are blessings that those who by faith enter into the covenant relation can enjoy here and now.

This week’s lesson, the final in our series on the covenant, looks at some of these immediate blessings, some of the promises that come from God’s grace shed into our hearts because, having heard Him knock, we have opened the door. Of course, there are more blessings than what we can touch on this week. It is just a start, the start of something that will, indeed, never end.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why should we feel joy? On what basis can we claim that promise? What is it about the covenant that should free us from the burden of guilt? What does it mean to have a new heart?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 26.

## Joy

**“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full”**  
(1 John 1:4).

Look at what John wrote here. In a few simple words, he expresses what should be one of the great advantages we, as covenant people, have—and that is the promise of joy.

As Christians, we are often told not to go by feeling, that faith is not feeling, and that we need to get beyond our feelings, all of which is true. But at the same time, we would not be human beings if we were not creatures of feelings, emotions, and moods. We cannot deny our feelings; what we need to do is understand them, give them their proper role, and, as much as possible, keep them under control. But to deny them is to deny what it means to be human (we might as well tell a circle not to be round). Indeed, as this verse says, not only should we have feelings (in this case joy), but they also should be full. It hardly sounds as if feelings are to be denied, does it?

**Read** the context of the above verse, starting at the beginning of the chapter. What was John writing to the early Christians that he hoped would make their joy full? And why should it give them joy?

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John was one of the original Twelve. He was there, almost from the start of Christ’s three-and-a-half-year ministry, a witness to some of the most amazing events of Jesus’ life. (John was there at the cross, at Gethsemane, and at the Transfiguration, as well). Thus, as an eyewitness, he was certainly well-qualified to talk about this subject.

Yet, notice, too, that the emphasis is not on himself; it is on what Jesus had done for the disciples so they can now have fellowship not only with each other but also with God Himself. Jesus has opened the way for us to enter into this close relationship with the Lord; and one result of this fellowship—this relationship—is joy. John wants them to know that what they have heard about Jesus is true (he saw, touched, felt, and heard Him), and thus they, too, can enter in a joyful relationship with their heavenly Father, who loves them and gave Himself through His Son for them.

**In a certain sense, John is giving his own personal testimony. What is your own testimony regarding your relationship with Jesus? What could you say that could help increase someone’s joy in the Lord, as John sought to do here?**

## Guilt-Free

**“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”**  
(Rom. 8:1).

A young woman had been brutally murdered, her killer unknown. The police, setting a trap, placed a hidden microphone in her grave. One evening, many months after her death, a young man approached the grave and, kneeling and weeping, begged the woman for forgiveness. The police, of course, monitoring his words, nabbed him for the crime.

What drove the man to the grave? It was guilt.

Of course, though none of us (we hope) has ever done anything as bad as what that young man did, we all are guilty; we all have done things we are ashamed of, things that we wish we could undo but cannot.

Thanks to Jesus and the blood of the new covenant, none of us has to live under the stigma of guilt. According to the text for today, there is no condemnation against us. The ultimate Judge counts us as not guilty, counts us as if we have not done the things we feel guilty about.

**How** do these verses help us understand Romans 8:1? *John 5:24; Rom. 3:24, 25; 2 Cor. 5:21.*

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One of the great promises of living in a covenant relationship with the Lord is that we no longer have to live under the burden of guilt. Because of the blood of the covenant, we—who choose to enter into that covenant relationship with God, who choose to abide by the conditions of faith, repentance, obedience—can have the burden of guilt lifted. When Satan seeks to whisper in our ears that we are evil, that we are bad, that we are too sinful to be accepted by God, we can do what Jesus did when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness: we can quote Scripture, and one of the best of all verses to quote is Romans 8:1. This does not mean denying the reality of sin in our lives; it means, instead, because of the covenant relationship we have with the Lord, we no longer live under the condemnation of that sin. Jesus paid the penalty for us, and He now stands in the presence of the Father pleading His own blood on our behalf, presenting His own righteousness instead of our sins.

**What difference does it make in your life that the Lord has forgiven you for whatever sins you might have committed? How does that reality help you in dealing with others who have sinned against you? How should it impact the way you deal with those people?**

## New Covenant and New Heart

**“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:17–19).**

As earlier studies this quarter showed, the new covenant is one in which the Lord puts the law in our hearts (*Jer. 31:31–33*). Not only is the law there, but also according to the texts for today, Christ is as well, which, of course, makes good sense, for Christ and His law are closely connected. Thus, with Christ’s law in our hearts, and with Christ dwelling there too (the Greek word translated in the above text as *dwell* also means “to settle in,” giving the idea of permanency), we come to another one of the great covenant benefits—a new heart.

**Why** do we need a new heart? What changes will be manifested in those who have a new heart?

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Read again the text for today. Notice that Paul stresses the element of love, saying that we must be “rooted and grounded” in it. These words imply stability, firmness, and permanency in the foundation of love. Our faith means nothing if it is not rooted in love for God and love for others (*Matt. 22:37–39, 1 Corinthians 13*). This love does not come in a vacuum. On the contrary, it comes because we get a glimpse of God’s love for us (a love that “passeth understanding”) as manifested through Jesus. As a result, by Him working in us, our lives are changed, our hearts are changed, and we become new people with new thoughts, new desires, and new goals. Our reaction to God’s love for us enables Him to change our hearts and instill in us love for others. Perhaps this is what Paul means, at least partially, when he talks about us being filled with “the fulness of God.”

**Read 1** John 4:16. How does this text relate to what Paul has written in Ephesians 3:17–19?

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Look at the texts we have studied today. What can you do that will allow the promises of these texts to be fulfilled in you? Are there things you need to change, things that are perhaps hampering you from experiencing the “fulness of God” (*Eph. 3:19*)? Make a list of what changes you need to make in your life. Make one for yourself and, if you are comfortable, make one that you could share with the class. How can you help each other make necessary changes?

## New Covenant and Eternal Life

**“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die”** (*John 11:25, 26, NASB*).

There are two dimensions to eternal life. The *present* dimension brings to the believer an experience of the abundant life now (*John 10:10*), which includes the many promises that we have been given for our lives now.

The *future* dimension is, of course, eternal life—the promise of the resurrection of the body (*John 5:28, 29; John 6:39*). Though still in the future, that is the one event that makes everything else worth it, the one event that caps all our hopes as Christians.

**Study** the verse for today. What is Jesus saying here? Where is eternal life found? How do we understand His words that those who live and believe in Him, even if they die, will never die? (*See Rev. 2:11; Rev. 20:6, 14; and Rev. 21:8.*)

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Of course, we all die, but according to Jesus, this death is only a sleep, a temporary hiatus that—for those who believe in Him—will end in the resurrection of life. When Christ returns, the dead in Christ will rise immortal, and the living followers of Christ will, in the twinkling of an eye, be changed into immortality. Both the dead and the living who are Christ’s will possess the same kind of resurrection body. Immortality begins at that time for God’s people.

What a great joy to know now that our end is not in the grave but that there is no end, that we will have a new life that lasts forever.

“Christ became one flesh with us, in order that we might become one spirit with Him. It is by virtue of this union that we are to come forth from the grave—not merely as a manifestation of the power of Christ, but because, through faith, His life has become ours. Those who see Christ in His true character, and receive Him into the heart, have everlasting life. It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 388.

**In what ways can we now enjoy the benefits of eternal life? In other words, what does this promise do for us now? Write down some of the benefits this promise of eternal life gives to you, personally, in your day-to-day life. How could you take this hope and promise and share it with someone who is struggling, perhaps with the death of a loved one?**

## New Covenant and Mission

**“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world’ ” (Matt. 28:19, 20).**

All over the world, people often struggle with what South African writer Laurens Van Der Post called “the burden of meaninglessness.” People find themselves with the gift of life, yet they do not know what to do with it, do not know what the purpose of this gift is, and do not know how to use it. It is like giving someone a library filled with rare books, only to have the person not read the books but use them to build fires. What a terrible waste of something so precious!

For the new covenant Christian, however, that problem is not one they need to struggle with. On the contrary, those who know (and have personally experienced) the wonderful news of a crucified and risen Savior, who died for the sins of every human being everywhere that they all might have eternal life, know joy. Considering the unequivocal call in Matthew 28:19, 20, the believer certainly has a mission and purpose in life, and that is to spread to the world the wonderful truth he or she has personally experienced in Christ Jesus. What a privilege! Almost anything else we do in this world will end when this world does. But spreading the gospel to others is a work that will make an imprint on eternity. Talk about a sense of mission and purpose!

**Break down** the verses for today into their various elements. What are the specific things Jesus is telling us to do, and what is involved in each one? What promise do we have that should give us the faith and courage to do what Christ commands?

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**As new covenant Christians, we have been given a clear mandate by the Lord Himself. Whoever we are, whatever our station in life, whatever our limits, we can all play a role. Have you been doing anything? Can you do more? What can your class do, together, to have a greater role in this work?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “God’s People Delivered,” pp. 635–645, in *The Great Controversy*; “Rejoicing in the Lord,” pp. 115–126, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The holy Son of God had no sins or griefs of his own to bear: he was bearing the griefs of others; for on him was laid the iniquity of us all. Through divine sympathy he connects himself with man, and as the representative of the race he submits to be treated as a transgressor. He looks into the abyss of woe opened for us by our sins, and proposes to bridge the gulf of man’s separation from God.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, August 1, 1892.

“Come, my brother, come just as you are, sinful and polluted. Lay your burden of guilt on Jesus, and by faith claim His merits. Come now, while mercy lingers; come with confession, come with contrition of soul, and God will abundantly pardon. Do not dare to slight another opportunity. Listen to the voice of mercy that now pleads with you to arise from the dead that Christ may give you light. Every moment now seems to connect itself directly with the destinies of the unseen world. Then let not your pride and unbelief lead you to still further reject offered mercy. If you do you will be left to lament at the last: ‘The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 353.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 “We see ourselves in relation to the cosmos,” wrote Francisco José Moreno, “and we are aware of our ignorance and final powerlessness; hence our insecurity. As a result, we fear.”—*Between Faith and Reason: Basic Fear and the Human Condition* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), p. 7. Compare this statement with what you studied this week in Ephesians 3:17–19. Discuss the differences between the two sentiments.
- 2 God promises us joy as believers in Jesus. Is joy the same as happiness? Should we always be happy? If we are not, is there something wrong with our Christian experience? What can the life of Jesus reveal that will help us understand the answers to these questions?
- 3 Discuss further this idea of being filled with “the fulness of God” (*Eph. 3:19*). What does that mean? How can we experience this in our lives?

**Summary:** The covenant is not just some deep theological concept; instead, it defines the parameters of our saving relationship with Christ, a relationship that reaps us wonderful benefits now and at His return.

## God Is Real

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Cristian Suárez started using drugs at the age of 14 in Colombia.

By 18, he was a hard-core drug user—and an up-and-coming rock star after winning an audition to join a well-known rock group. He thought he had reached the top, playing to wild crowds in sold-out soccer stadiums.

When he turned 21, he decided to go solo, and his dreams collapsed. After a daunting year on his own, he was left with no money or home. He moved back in with his mother. Drugs seemed to be his sole refuge.

Cristian had never believed in God. But sad, lonely, and alone at home, he lifted up his eyes and said, “Lord, I don’t know who You are. I don’t even believe in You. But if You are real, if You really exist, I need You to tell me. If You tell me, ‘I am real,’ I will follow You.”

At that precise moment, his cell phone rang.

“Hello, could I please speak with Cristian Suárez,” an older woman said.

“You are speaking to him,” he said. “How can I help you?”

“Cristian, I’ve called to tell you that God is real,” she said.

Cristian was shocked. The caller had said the exact words that he had asked from God in order to believe in Him.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

He didn’t recognize her name, Nulbia, when she gave it. She said she was the 65-year-old sister of one of his musician friends, Leonardo.

“Why did you tell me precisely those words?” Cristian asked.

She said Cristian had visited her home for the first time two weeks earlier to pick up her brother for a rehearsal. That night, she prayed, “Lord, that man needs You.” She got Cristian’s phone number from her brother and, two weeks later, felt impressed to call. She prayed, “Lord, use me,” and made the call.

Cristian excitedly called another friend, Alfonso, to tell him about the phone call. Alfonso got a strange sound in his voice and asked Cristian to come over to his house. He met Cristian with a Bible in his hand. Cristian was surprised. Alfonso had never mentioned God in the years that they had been friends. That night, Alfonso gave him a thorough Bible study about Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. It turned out that Alfonso wanted to become an Adventist.

Three months later, Cristian was baptized and free of drugs. Today, a decade later, he is studying to become a pastor at Colombia Adventist University in Medellin, Colombia. Alfonso also has joined the Adventist Church.



Cristian no longer has any doubt about God. “Nothing is impossible for God,” he said.

This quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a missionary training center at Colombia Adventist University.



**Study Focus:** *John 10:10****Part I: Overview***

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The covenant between God and humanity goes beyond religious dogma and doctrine alone; instead it defines our relationship with heaven. By accepting the covenant, we open our lives to God’s love and His promise of salvation.

***Part II: Commentary***

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Painter Willem de Kooning, who lived in New York City, spent time in rural North Carolina, and one evening he and his wife exited a party and walked outside. The sky was cloudless; the stars sizzled. “It was a sight never seen in the city, where the reflected glare blanked out the stars and only a slice of the sky was visible from a loft window. ‘Let’s go back to the party,’ de Kooning said suddenly. ‘The universe gives me the creeps.’ ”—Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan, *de Kooning: An American Master* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc., 2006), pp. 263, 264.

**The Creeps?**

Sure, a place measured in light-years by entities like us, measured in feet and inches, would seem creepy. And then, squatting for millennia at the center of the universe (or so we thought), only to be ingloriously exiled to the fringes of one galaxy out of trillions—our egos have taken a hit.

“The life of a man,” David Hume lamented, “is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster.”

That depends upon the universe, actually. In a meaningless, purposeless, and godless one, you could make that argument, perhaps (though even then, an oyster?). But not in the universe depicted in Scripture like this: “Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS” (*Matt. 1:24, 25, NKJV*).

Humanity is so important that the God who created the universe became part of it. (Compared to what it took to make the universe in the first place, becoming part of it would be easy.) The One whose creation is measured in light-years shrank into Someone measured in feet and inches.

Willem de Kooning, limited by the laws of nature, couldn’t transform himself into one of his creations. But God, not limited by those laws, could—and did, and that’s who Jesus of Nazareth was. The Creator became a person, a human being who, as one of us, has thus linked Himself to us with ties that will never be broken.

And central to the covenant promise is what Christ did by coming

and dying so that we have the promise of eternal life. This is ours not by works but by grace, and it becomes ours by faith.

And faith, like a chariot wheel, rolls us to the portals of grace. To *believe in* Christ means to believe that Christ's death possesses the omnipotence to eradicate every past sin. This is called justification by faith. To *believe on* Christ means to believe that the *Paraclete* (the cosmic Comforter), through Christ's priesthood, can impart omnipresent grace to overcome our character deficiencies. This is called sanctification by faith. To *believe* Christ simply means to trust His omniscience. It means to lean the entire personality on the flawless, life-changing mind and heart of the Resurrection and the Life. Yes, we are saved by *grace*, but faith is the bus ride that transports us to the venue of grace.

### **New Covenant and Eternal Life**

“Throughout the NT this good news about the resurrection is far more than interesting data about the future. It transforms life in the present by investing it with meaning and hope. Because of their confidence about their destiny, Christians already live a new kind of life. Those who live in the hope of sharing the glory of God are transformed into different people. They can even rejoice in suffering, because their lives are motivated by hope.”—John C. Brunt, “Resurrection and Glorification,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, p. 349.

### **New Covenant and Mission**

“The ultimate focus of all Bible prophecy and salvation history is the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. Holy Scripture begins with Paradise created and lost (Gen. 1–3) and ends in the NT with Paradise restored (Rev. 21; 22). The election of Israel as the chosen covenant people of God was not an end in itself but God's appointed way to establish a visible sign before the nations of the justice and peace of the coming kingdom of God. Christ Jesus taught the New Covenant people, His church, to pray, ‘Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt. 6:10). Thus the apostolic gospel message received its apocalyptic perspective in fundamental continuity with God's covenant with ancient Israel.”—Hans K. LaRondelle, “The Remnant and the Three Angels' Messages,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, p. 857.

## ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Reflection:** Browsing through a book of quotations, you may note that the most fascinating quotes are often statements made by people on their deathbeds. A famous atheist's last words were “About to take a fearful leap into the dark!” All of God's covenants, all of His promises, are nailed to one simple desire—He wants to save us from sin. With the end of life comes the verdict of our covenant relationship.

1. A pastor said, “I believe in deathbed confessions. I know God accepts them, but I have to admit I’m a bit nervous about them. I can’t help wondering if the confession is absolutely genuine.” It is natural to speculate about the motives of others. How does God view the approaching sinner asking for salvation? How does God’s knowledge of the future affect His response?

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2. Entering into a covenant relationship with God cleanses us of guilt and regret. It also fills us with joy. Imagine what happens in the courts of heaven when you take the first step toward eternity in heaven. What do you think your guardian angel might say? In the heavenly scheme of things, how does entering into a covenant relationship with God affect your access to eternal life?

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3. Two thieves hung on either side of Jesus. One mocked Him. The other asked for salvation. With what confidence can a person claim God’s promise after years of turning away? Notice that Jesus did not address the thief until the thief spoke to Him. What does this say about the role of the Holy Spirit? How does this help us to understand that we can ask for salvation regardless of how hopeless we think we might be? The thief lived only a short while after accepting Christ. What impact, however, can his life as a Christian have on others? How does entering into a covenant relationship with God affect our response to missions and evangelism?

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4. Someone has described the thief's eleventh-hour salvation as "literally blundering into Paradise." Do some people try to take advantage of God's grace by waiting to accept Christ after they have lived the way they want, as the thief did? Explain. How would you convince a person of the importance of accepting Christ now instead of waiting until the eleventh hour?

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5. Ambrose, an early Christian preacher, said, "How much richer was Christ's grace than the malefactor's prayer!" Why do we sometimes question our Christianity when there is more than enough of God's grace to compensate for our every sin? Why is being a Christian more than claiming the title? Does being a Christian mean you will be saved? Explain. What verses could you quote to verify your salvation?

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6. Many people spend their lives looking for happiness, which is usually fairly elusive. Joy, a fruit of the Spirit, is something we should hope for. What is the difference between happiness and joy? Is joy, like happiness, something we can presumably achieve, or is it, like salvation, given to us? Explain.

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7. There are many things we are capable of doing that are worthy of feelings of guilt. God through Christ offers us a way to escape from that guilt. Does that necessarily mean we can, or should, stop feeling guilty? Is it irresponsible to do so? Explain.

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- 8. We often hear the expression “Let your conscience be your guide.” Is your conscience identical to the new heart that God promises in a number of places in the Bible? Is your conscience really that reliable of a guide?**

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- 9. Jesus promises us eternal life through faith in Him. Why is eternal life desirable? Does it mean something other than merely living one day after another, without an end in sight? How do you think eternal life with Christ will be qualitatively different from our current existence?**

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- 10. Our current task as Christians in the world is to spread the good news of Christ to the world. Does this mean that all Christians must have the personalities of persuasive salespeople? Why, or why not? How can Christ use the whole spectrum of personalities and talents to bring His message to those who need it?**

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Who doesn't, at times, struggle with fear, worry, or dread of what the future holds? The future is full of questions, and in this unstable world, the answers might not be what we want to hear. We wonder if we will be able to make a looming deadline, to cover the rent or school payment, to make our struggling marriages survive another storm. We wonder if God can continue to love us, even though we "disappoint" Him again and again.

Our study for this quarter, *Resting in Christ*, will tackle some of those fears head-on. Resting in Christ is the key to the type of life that Jesus promises to His followers (*John 10:10, NKJV*). Rest connects to salvation, grace, Creation, the Sabbath, our understanding of the state of the dead, the soon coming of Jesus—and so much more.

When Jesus invited us to come and find rest in Him (*Matt. 11:28*), He did not address His disciples or the early Christian church alone. He saw future generations of sin-sick, weary, worn-out, struggling human beings who needed access to the Source of rest. As you study the lessons during this quarter, remember to come and rest in Him. After all, our heavenly Father is in control and is ready to bring us home safely.

## Lesson 1—Living in a 24-7 Society

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Worn and Weary** (*Matt. 11:28*)

MONDAY: **Running on Empty** (*Jer. 45:1-5*)

TUESDAY: **Defining Rest in the Old Testament** (*2 Sam. 7:12*)

WEDNESDAY: **Rest in the New Testament** (*Mark 6:30-32, NKJV*)

THURSDAY: **A Restless Wanderer** (*Gen. 4:1-12, NIV*)

**Memory Text**—*Psalms 84:2, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** In the busy times of our lives, we often yearn for the rest that only the Living God offers. Sabbath is a time when we can become refreshed and commune with Him.

## Lesson 2—Restless and Rebellious

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Restless in the Wilderness** (*Num. 11:1-15*)

MONDAY: **It's Contagious** (*Num. 12:1-3*)

TUESDAY: **Restlessness Leads to Rebellion** (*Num. 14:1-10*)

WEDNESDAY: **An Intercessor** (*Num. 14:11-19*)

THURSDAY: **Faith Versus Presumption** (*Num. 14:39-45*)

**Memory Text**—*1 Corinthians 10:11, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Christ offers rest to all who come to Him in faith and obedience.

**Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind** The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on audio CD, and via online download to people who are legally blind or physically disabled. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; email: [services@christianrecord.org](mailto:services@christianrecord.org); website: [www.christianrecord.org](http://www.christianrecord.org).