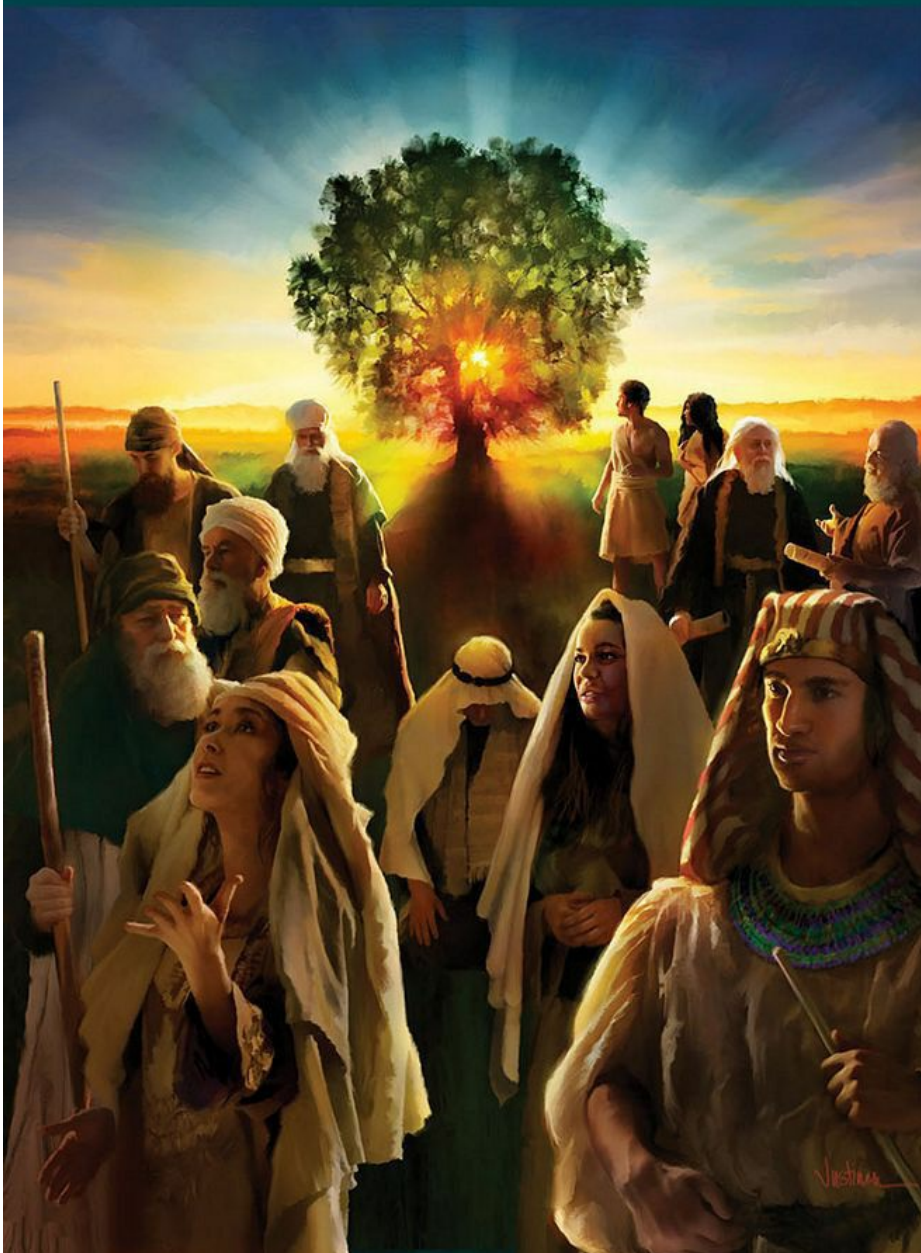


Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
April | May | June 2022

GENESIS



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The Book of the Beginning



Genesis is about Jesus: Jesus our Creator, Jesus our Sustainer, Jesus our Redeemer. Writing millennia after the Genesis text itself had been penned by Moses, and reaching back across those ages to the patriarch's very words, the apostle John reveals Jesus in the Creation account: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (*John 1:1-4, NKJV*).

What did John write here? "In the beginning" all things that were made, all things that once didn't exist, came into existence—by Jesus. All creation—from galaxies hurtling across the cosmos in staggering pinwheels of fire and light to the meticulous DNA woven miraculously into the cell to quantum waves—Jesus created and sustains it all. And the book of Genesis is the first story in Scripture of both this creation and the redemption of this creation. Here, in this book, is the world's only "official" account of our origins.

The English word *Genesis* is derived from the Greek *genesis*, which means "beginning," itself derived from the Hebrew *bereshit*, "in the beginning"—the first word of the book (hence, the first word of the entire Bible!). Genesis gives us the foundation, the base, upon which all the following Scriptures rest. Because it is first, and so foundational to all that comes after, Genesis is probably the most quoted or referred to book in the rest of the Scriptures.

Genesis is important because it is the book that, more than any other work, anywhere, helps us understand just who we are as human beings, a truth especially important now, in a day when we humans are deemed as

nothing but accidents, chance creations of a purely materialistic universe. Or, as one physicist put it, we humans are “organized mud” (which is to some degree true, though for him the laws of nature alone organized it!). Genesis, however, reveals to us our true origin, that we were beings purposely and perfectly made in the image of God in a perfect world. Genesis also explains the Fall; that is, why our world is no longer perfect and why we as humans aren’t, as well. Genesis, however, also comforts us with God’s promise of salvation in a world that, in and of itself, offers us nothing but suffering and death.

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With its dramatic stories of miracles (Creation, births, the rainbow) and judgments (the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah) witnessing to God’s holy presence, Genesis is awe inspiring. But Genesis also is a book with moving human stories of love (Jacob and Rachel), of hatred (Jacob and Esau), of birth (Isaac, Jacob, Jacob’s sons), of death (Sarah, Rachel, Jacob, Joseph), of murder (Cain, Simeon, and Levi), and forgiveness (Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers). It also is an instruction book with lessons on ethics (Cain, Babel), on faith (Abraham, Jacob), and on the hope and promise of redemption (the crushing of the serpent, the Promised Land).

During this quarter, not only will we read and study the book of Genesis—but we also will enjoy its beautiful stories and learn to walk better with the Lord of Creation, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Meanwhile, the geographical movements of the book—from Eden to Babel, to the Promised Land, to Egypt, to the prospect of the Promised Land—remind us of our nomadic journeys and nurture our hope for the real Promised Land, the new heaven and the new earth. As we follow the various characters across the pages of Genesis, we will discover that—regardless of how different the time, place, culture, and circumstance—often their stories are, in many ways, ours, as well.

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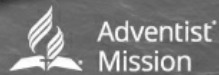
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The Creation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 100:1–3, Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Exod. 20:8–11, Exod. 40:33, Matt. 25:14–30, Matt. 19:7–9.*

Memory Text: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Genesis 1:1, NKJV*).

The book of Genesis and, hence, the whole Bible begins with God's acts of Creation. This fact is very important because it means that our creation marks the beginning of human and biblical history. This truth also implies that the Genesis Creation story has the same historical veracity as other events of human and biblical history.

The two Creation texts in Genesis 1 and 2 contain lessons about God and humanity. As we study this week, we will understand better the profound meaning of the seventh-day Sabbath. We will ponder God's act of creating humans in His image, and out of the dust too. We will be intrigued by the purpose of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and by its connection with the tree of life.

The most important lesson of the biblical stories of the beginnings is a lesson on grace. Our existence is purely an act of grace. God created the heavens and the earth while humans were not yet present. Just as our creation was, our redemption is, too, a gift from God. And how profound it is that both concepts, Creation and Redemption, exist in the seventh-day Sabbath commandment.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 2.*

The God of Creation

Read Psalm 100:1–3. What is the human response to the God of Creation, and why?

In Genesis 1, the first message of the Creation account is “God.” We hear it in the translation: “In the beginning God” (*Gen. 1:1*). In the first line (*Gen. 1:1*), the word “God” is placed in the middle of the verse and is underlined by the strongest accent in the Hebrew liturgical, traditional chanting in order to emphasize the importance of God. The Creation text begins, then, with an emphasis on God, the Author of Creation.

The book of Genesis begins, in fact, with two different presentations of God. The first Creation account (*Gen. 1:1–2:4*) presents God as infinitely far from humans, the transcendent God, *Elohim*, whose name speaks of the supremacy of God. The name *Elohim* denotes preeminence and strength, and the use of the plural form of the word *Elohim* expresses the idea of majesty and transcendence.

The second Creation account (*Gen. 2:4–25*) presents God as up close and personal, the immanent God YHWH, whose name many believe denotes closeness and relationship. The Creation text as a whole is, then, an implicit appeal to worship God; first, to be aware of God’s infinite grandeur and power, and at the same time to acknowledge our dependence on Him because He created us “and not we ourselves” (*Ps. 100:3*). This is why many of the psalms often associate worship with Creation (*Ps. 95:1–6; Ps. 139:13, 14 [compare with Rev. 14:7]*).

This twofold view of a God who is both majestic and powerful, and who also is close, loving, and in a relationship with us, makes an important point about how we should approach God in worship. Awe and reverence go along with joy and the assurance of God’s proximity, forgiveness, and love (*see Ps. 2:11*). Even the sequence of the two presentations of God is meaningful: the experience of God’s proximity and the intimacy of His presence follows the experience of God’s distance. Only when we have realized that God is great shall we be able to appreciate His grace and enjoy, in trembling, His wonderful and loving presence in our lives.

Think about the vast power of God, who upholds the cosmos, and yet can be so near to each of us. Why is this amazing truth so amazing?

The Creation

Read Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31, and Genesis 2:1–3. What is the significance of the refrain “it was good” in the first Creation account? What is the implied lesson contained in the conclusion of Creation (Gen. 2:1–3)?

At each step of the Creation account, God evaluates His work as *tov*, “good.” It is generally understood that this adjective means that God’s work of Creation was successful and that God’s observation that “it was good” means that “it worked.” The light was illuminating (Gen. 1:4), the plants were yielding fruit (Gen. 1:12), and so forth.

But this word referred to more than the efficiency of a function. The Hebrew word *tov* also is used in the Bible to express an aesthetic appreciation of something beautiful (Gen. 24:16). It also is used in contrast to evil (Gen. 2:9), which is associated with death (Gen. 2:17).

The phrase “it was good” means that the Creation was working nicely, that it was beautiful and perfect, and that there was no evil in it. The world was “not yet” like our world, affected by sin and death, an idea affirmed in the introduction to the second Creation account (see Gen. 2:5).

This description of the Creation radically contradicts the theories of evolution, which dogmatically declare that the world shaped itself progressively through a succession of accidental happenings, starting from an inferior condition and progressing to a superior one.

In contrast, the biblical author affirms that God intentionally and suddenly created the world (Gen. 1:1). There was nothing happenstance or chancy about any of it. The world did not come about by itself but only as the result of God’s will and Word (Gen. 1:3). The verb *bara*, “create,” translated in Genesis 1 as in the beginning God “created” the heavens and the earth, occurs only with God as its subject, and it denotes abruptness: *God spoke, and it was so*.

The Creation text informs us that “everything” had been done then (Gen. 1:31), and according to the Creator Himself, it was all judged “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Genesis 1:1 states the event itself, the Creation of heaven and earth; and Genesis 2:1 declares that the event was finished. And it was all completed, including the Sabbath, in seven days.

Why does the idea of billions of years of evolution completely nullify the Genesis Creation story? Why are the two views incompatible in every way?

The Sabbath

Read Genesis 2:2, 3 and Exodus 20:8–11. Why is the seventh-day Sabbath related to Creation? How does this connection impact how we keep the Sabbath?

It is precisely because “God ended” His works of Creation that He instituted the Sabbath. The seventh-day Sabbath is, therefore, the expression of our faith that God finished His work then, and that He found it “very good.” To keep the Sabbath is to join with God in the recognition of the value and beauty of His creation.

We can rest from our works just as God had rested from His. Sabbath keeping means saying yes to God’s “very good” Creation, which includes our physical bodies. Contrary to some ancient (and modern) beliefs, nothing in Scripture, Old or New Testament, denigrates the body as evil. That’s a pagan concept, not a biblical one. Instead, Sabbath keepers are grateful for God’s creation—which includes their own flesh—and that is why they can enjoy the creation and why they take care of it.

The Sabbath, which marks the first “end” of human history, also is a sign of hope for suffering humankind and for the groaning of the world. It is interesting that the phrase “finished the work” reappears at the end of the construction of the sanctuary (*Exod. 40:33*) and again at the end of the building of Solomon’s temple (*1 Kings 7:40, 51*)—both places where the lesson of the gospel and salvation had been taught.

After the Fall, the Sabbath, at the end of the week, points to the miracle of salvation, which will take place only through the miracle of a new creation (*Isa. 65:17, Rev. 21:1*). The Sabbath is a sign at the end of our human week that the suffering and trials of this world will have an end, as well.

This is why Jesus chose the Sabbath as the most appropriate day to heal the sick (*Luke 13:13–16*). Contrary to whatever traditions the leaders were stuck in, by the Sabbath healings Jesus pointed the people, and us, to the time when all pain, all suffering, all death, will be over, which is the ultimate conclusion to the salvation process. Hence, each Sabbath points us to the hope of redemption.

By resting on the Sabbath day, how are we experiencing the rest and salvation that we have in Jesus now and that which will be fulfilled, ultimately, in the creation of the new heaven and new earth?

The Creation of Humanity

The creation of humans is God's last act of Creation, at least in the Genesis account. Humans are the culmination of the whole earthly Creation, the purpose for which the earth was made.

Read Genesis 1:26–29 and Genesis 2:7. What is the connection between these two different versions in regard to the creation of humanity?

That God has created humans in His image is one of the boldest statements of the Bible. Only humans have been created in the image of God. Though “God made the beast of the earth according to its kind” (*Gen. 1:25, NKJV*), “God created man in His own image” (*Gen. 1:27, NKJV; emphasis added*). This formula has often been limited to the spiritual nature of humans, which is interpreted to mean that the “image of God” is understood to signify only the administrative function of representing God, or the spiritual function of relationship with God or with each other.

While these understandings are correct, they fail to include the important physical reality of this creation. Both dimensions are, indeed, included in the two words “image” and “likeness” describing this process in Genesis 1:26. While the Hebrew word *tselem*, “image,” refers to the concrete shape of the physical body, the word *demut*, “likeness,” refers to abstract qualities that are comparable to the divine Person.

Therefore, the Hebrew notion of the “image of God” should be understood in the wholistic sense of the biblical view of human nature. The biblical text affirms that human individuals (men and women) have been created in God's image physically, as well as spiritually. As Ellen G. White clearly comments: “When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker.”—*Education*, p. 15.

In fact, this wholistic understanding of the image of God, including the physical body, is reaffirmed in the other Creation account, which says that “man became a living being” (*Gen. 2:7, NKJV*), literally, “a living soul” (*nefesh*), as the result of two divine operations: God “formed” and God “breathed.” Note that the “breath” often refers to the spiritual dimension, but it also is closely tied to the biological capacity for breathing, the part of the man that was “formed . . . of the dust of the ground.” It is the “breath of life”; that is, breath (spiritual) and life (physical).

God will later perform a third operation, this time to create the woman from the body of the man (*Gen. 2:21, 22*), a way to emphasize that she is of the same nature as the man.

The Duty of Humanity

As soon as God created the first man, He offered him three gifts: the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 2:8*), food (*Gen. 2:16*), and the woman (*Gen. 2:22*).

Read Genesis 2:15–17. What is man’s duty toward creation and toward God? How do these two duties relate to each other?

The first duty of man concerns the natural environment in which God has put him: “to tend and keep it” (*Gen. 2:15, NKJV*). The verb ‘*avad*, “tend,” refers to work. It is not enough to receive a gift. We have to work on it and to make it fruitful—a lesson that Jesus will repeat in His parable of the talents (*Matt. 25:14–30*). The verb *shamar*, “keep,” implies the responsibility to preserve what has been received.

The second duty concerns his food. We have to remember that God gave it to humans (*see Gen. 1:29*). God also said to Adam that “‘you may freely eat’ ” (*Gen. 2:16, NKJV*). Humans didn’t create the trees—or the food on them. They were a gift, a gift of grace.

But there is a commandment here, as well: they were to receive and enjoy God’s generous gift “ ‘of every tree’ ” (*NKJV*). As a part of this grace, though, God added a restriction. They should not eat from one particular tree. Enjoying without any restriction will lead to death. This principle was right in the Garden of Eden, and in many ways, that same principle exists today.

The third duty of man concerns the woman, God’s third gift: “man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife” (*Gen. 2:24, NKJV*). This extraordinary statement is a powerful expression that highlights human responsibility toward the conjugal covenant and the purpose of being “one flesh” (*NKJV*), meaning one person (*compare with Matt. 19:7–9*).

The reason it is the man (and not the woman) who should leave his parents may have to do with the biblical generic use of the masculine; hence, perhaps, the commandment applies to the woman too. Either way, the bond of marriage, though a gift from God, entails human responsibility once the gift has been received, a responsibility that rests with both the man and the woman to fulfill it faithfully.

Think about all that you have been given by God. What are your responsibilities with what you have been given?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Science and the Bible,” pp. 128, 129, in *Education*; “The Creation,” in *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 21, 22.

“Since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony. By different methods, and in different languages, they witness to the same great truths. Science is ever discovering new wonders; but she brings from her research nothing that, rightly understood, conflicts with divine revelation. The book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other. They make us acquainted with God by teaching us something of the laws through which He works.

“Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have, however, led to supposed conflict between science and revelation; and in the effort to restore harmony, interpretations of Scripture have been adopted that undermine and destroy the force of the word of God. Geology has been thought to contradict the literal interpretation of the Mosaic record of the creation. Millions of years, it is claimed, were required for the evolution of the earth from chaos; and in order to accommodate the Bible to this supposed revelation of science, the days of creation are assumed to have been vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years.

“Such a conclusion is wholly uncalled for. The Bible record is in harmony with itself and with the teaching of nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 128, 129.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why would the quality of our faith be affected if we believed that these stories of the beginnings were legends, “myths” essentially designed to instruct us in spiritual lessons but without historical reality? What clues in the biblical text suggest that the biblical author knew that they were “historical” just as the rest of the stories in the book of Genesis are? What is Jesus’ testimony about the historical truth of these stories?
- 2 What does the Genesis story teach us about the importance of stewardship of the earth? How can we be good stewards of our planet while, at the same time, avoiding the danger of all but worshiping the creation itself, as opposed to the Creator, which is a very real temptation? (See *Rom. 1:25*.)
- 3 Despite the ravages of sin over the long millennia, in what ways does the original wonder and beauty and majesty of the “very good” Creation still manifest itself to us, speaking to us in powerful ways of God’s goodness and might?

Mocked for the Sabbath

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Students mocked Laissa Samila Yassine for skipping classes on Saturdays in Mozambique. “You came here to this university to study, not to follow your church’s teachings,” said one. “You’re crazy,” said another.

It all began when Laissa was struggling with her mechanical engineering studies during her first semester at a public university, and she found relief listening to music shared by a Seventh-day Adventist classmate, Belizario. Then she and Belizario began to study the Bible together. Laissa had other new friends, and they also studied the Bible.

The more she studied, the more she felt confused. The two Bible studies didn’t agree about the Sabbath. She quit both to search the Bible for herself. Prayerfully, she read the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:8–11, which begins, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (NKJV). She read the Lord’s call in Isaiah 58:13 to “turn away ... from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight” (NKJV) and Jesus’ words, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NKJV). She decided to keep the Sabbath.

At first, Laissa hid her decision. She was afraid of being ridiculed, and she didn’t want to ask teachers to be excused from Saturday classes. She also worried about what her parents would say. However, she couldn’t keep her convictions to herself for long, and she announced at the end of the second semester that she would become an Adventist. Her worst fears materialized. Former friends taunted her and, when they saw her walking with Belizario, sneered, “Oh, those Adventists.” Teachers refused to reschedule Saturday classes, and her grades dropped. “If you don’t like it here, just leave,” teachers said. Her mother was furious, and her father disowned her.

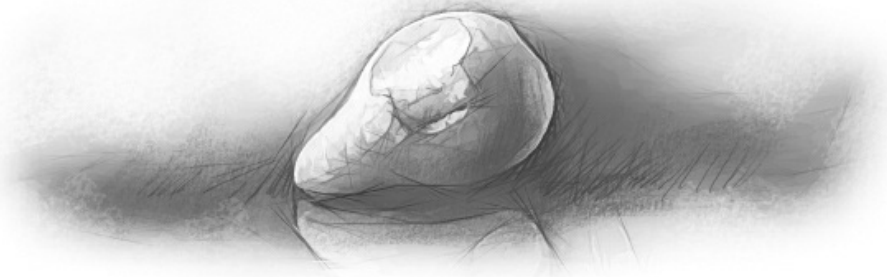
Then Laissa met a visiting student from Mozambique Adventist University at her church on Sabbath. She was excited to learn about an Adventist university in Mozambique, and she begged her mother to allow her to transfer. Her mother initially refused but unexpectedly changed her mind after Laissa, like Queen Esther, prayed and fasted for three days for God to intervene. A short time after changing universities, she told her mother that she no longer needed help with expenses. Her new library job covered her costs. Her mother was astonished. “Indeed, the Lord is not your stepfather but your real Father,” she said.

LAISSA, 22, now a second-year nutrition major, plans to become a missionary in Mozambique, where malnutrition is a serious problem. Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering three years ago helped Mozambique Adventist University expand its nutrition department with new classrooms and equipment.



Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

The Fall



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 3; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:7–9; John 8:44; Rom. 16:20; Heb. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:14, 15.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel’ ” (*Genesis 3:15, NKJV*).

Amid all that God had given our first parents in Eden also came a warning: “ ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’ ” (*Gen. 2:16, 17, NKJV*). This warning against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil shows us that, though they were to know good, they were not to know evil.

We certainly can understand why, can't we?

And, too, the threat of death attached to the warning about disobedience (*Gen. 2:17*) would be fulfilled: they would die (*Gen. 3:19*). Not only forbidden to eat from the tree, they also were driven from the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 3:24*), and thus had no access to what could have given them eternal life as sinners (*Gen. 3:22*).

However, amid this tragedy comes hope, which is found in *Genesis 3:15*, called the protoevangelium, or “the first gospel promise.” Yes, this verse presents the first gospel promise found in the Bible, the first time humans are told that, despite the Fall, God has made a way of escape for us all.

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

The Serpent

Read Genesis 3:1, 2 Corinthians 11:3, and Revelation 12:7–9. Who is the serpent, and how does he deceive Eve?

The text begins with “the serpent.” The syntax of the phrase suggests emphasis: the word “serpent” is the first word of the sentence. Also, “the serpent” has the definite article, indicating that this is a well-known figure, as if the reader already should know who he is. The reality of this being is, thus, affirmed from the first word of the chapter.

Of course, the Scriptures identify the serpent as the enemy of God (*Isa. 27:1*) and explicitly call him “the Devil and Satan” (*Rev. 12:9, NKJV*). Likewise, in the ancient Near East, the serpent personified the power of evil.

“In order to accomplish his work unperceived, Satan chose to employ as his medium the serpent—a disguise well adapted for his purpose of deception. The serpent was then one of the wisest and most beautiful creatures on the earth. It had wings, and while flying through the air presented an appearance of dazzling brightness, having the color and brilliancy of burnished gold.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 53.

When talking about the devil, in whatever form he appears, the Bible is not using mere metaphor. In Scripture Satan is depicted as a literal being and not just some rhetorical symbol or an abstract principle to depict evil or humanity’s dark side.

The serpent does not present himself as an enemy of God. On the contrary, the serpent refers to God’s words, which he repeats and seems to support. That is, right from the start, we can see that Satan likes to quote God and, as shall later be seen, even quotes the Word of God itself (*Matt. 4:6*).

Note also that the serpent does not argue immediately with the woman, but he asks a question that implies that he believes in what the Lord has said to them. After all, he asked: “ ‘Has God indeed said . . . ?’ ” (*Gen. 3:1, NKJV*). Thus, even from the start, we can see just how cunning and deceitful this being was. And, as we will see, it worked too.

If Satan was able to deceive a sinless Eve in Eden, how much more vulnerable are we? What is our best defense against his deceptions?

The Forbidden Fruit

Read Genesis 2:16, 17 and Genesis 3:1–6 (see also *John 8:44*). Compare the words of God’s commandment to Adam with the serpent’s words to the woman. What are the differences between the speeches, and what is the meaning of these differences?

Note the parallels between God’s conversation with Adam (*Gen. 2:16, 17*) and Eve’s conversation with the serpent. It is as if the serpent has now replaced God and knows even better than He does. At first, he merely asked a question, implying that the woman had, perhaps, misunderstood God. But then Satan openly questioned God’s intentions and even contradicted Him.

Satan’s attack concerns two issues, death and the knowledge of good and evil. While God clearly and emphatically stated that their death would be certain (*Gen. 2:17*), Satan said that, on the contrary, they wouldn’t die, stating that humans were immortal (*Gen. 3:4*). While God forbade Adam to eat the fruit (*Gen. 2:17*), Satan encouraged them to eat the fruit because by eating of it they would be like God (*Gen. 3:5*).

Satan’s two arguments, immortality and being like God, convinced Eve to eat the fruit. It is troubling that as soon as the woman decided to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit, she behaved as if God were no longer present and had been replaced by herself. The biblical text alludes to this shift of personality. Eve uses God’s language: Eve’s evaluation of the forbidden fruit, “saw that . . . was good” (*Gen. 3:6*), reminds us of God’s evaluation of His creation, “saw . . . that it was good” (*Gen. 1:4, etc.*).

These two temptations, those of being immortal and of being like God, are at the root of the idea of immortality in ancient Egyptian and Greek religions. The desire for immortality, which they believed was a divine attribute, obliged these people to seek divine status, as well, in order (they hoped) to acquire immortality. Surreptitiously, this way of thinking infiltrated Jewish-Christian cultures and has given birth to the belief in the immortality of the soul, which exists even today in many churches.

Think of all the beliefs out there today that teach there’s something inherently immortal in all of us. How does our understanding of human nature and the state of the dead provide us such powerful protection against this dangerous deception?

Hiding Before God

Read Genesis 3:7–13. Why did Adam and Eve feel the need to hide before God? Why did God ask the question “Where are you?” How did Adam and Eve seek to justify their behavior?

After they sinned, Adam and Eve felt naked because they lost their garments of glory, which reflected God’s presence (see Ps. 8:5, compare with Ps. 104:1, 2). The image of God had been affected by sin. The verb “make” in the phrase they “made themselves coverings” (Gen. 3:7, NKJV) was so far applied only to God the Creator (Gen. 1:7, 16, 25, etc.). It is as if they replaced the Creator as they attempted to cover their sin, an act that Paul denounces as righteousness by works (Gal. 2:16).

When God approaches, He asks them the rhetorical question “ ‘Where are you?’ ” (Gen. 3:9, NKJV), the same kind of question that God will ask Cain (Gen. 4:9). Of course, God knew the answers to the questions. His questions were asked for the benefit of the guilty, to help them realize what they have done and yet, at the same time, to lead them to repentance and salvation. From the moment humans sinned, the Lord was working for their salvation and redemption.

In fact, the whole scenario reflects the idea of the investigative judgment, which begins with the judge, who interrogates the culprit (Gen. 3:9) in order to prepare him for the sentence (Gen. 3:14–19). But He does it also to prompt repentance, which will ultimately lead to salvation (Gen. 3:15). This is a motif seen all through the Bible.

At first, as is so common with sinners, Adam and Eve both try to evade the charge, seeking to blame others. To God’s question Adam responds that it was the woman whom God had given to him (Gen. 3:12)—she led him to do it. It was her fault (and, implied, it was God’s, as well), not his.

Eve responds that it was the serpent who deceived her. The Hebrew verb *nasha*, “deceive,” (in Gen. 3:13, NKJV) means to give people false hopes and makes them believe that they are doing the right thing (2 Kings 19:10, Isa. 37:10, Jer. 49:16).

Adam blames the woman, saying that she gave him the fruit (some truth to this), and Eve blames the serpent, saying he deceived her (some truth to this, too). But in the end, they both were guilty.

Trying to blame someone else for what they have done? Why is it so easy for us to fall into the same trap?

The Fate of the Serpent

“ ‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel’ ” (*Gen. 3:15, NIV*).

What did the Lord say to the serpent here, and what hope is implied in these verses?

God begins His judgment with the serpent because he is the one who initiated the whole drama. The serpent, too, is the only being who is cursed in this narrative.

We reach here a kind of “reversal” of Creation. While Creation led to life, the appreciation of good, and blessings, judgment leads to death, evil, and curses—but also to the hope and promise of salvation. Attached to the somber picture of the crushed serpent eating the dust (*Gen. 3:14*) shines the hope of the salvation of humankind, which appears in the form of a prophecy. Even before the condemnations of Adam and Eve, which will follow, the Lord gives them the hope of redemption (*Gen. 3:15*). Yes, they have sinned; yes, they will suffer because of their sin; and, yes, they will die, too, because of the sins. But despite all that, there is the ultimate hope, the hope of salvation.

Compare Genesis 3:15 with Romans 16:20, Hebrews 2:14, and Revelation 12:17. How is the plan of salvation, as well as the great controversy, revealed in these texts?

Notice the parallels between Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12:17: the dragon (serpent), enraged (enmity); the seed (offspring); and the woman in Eden and the woman in Revelation 12:17. The battle (the great controversy) that moved to Eden, with the Fall, will continue to the end of time. However, the promise of Satan’s defeat already was given in Eden, in that his head will be crushed, a theme more explicitly revealed in Revelation, which depicts his final demise (*Rev. 20:10*). That is, right from the start, humanity was given hope that there will be a way out of the terrible mess that came from the knowledge of evil, a hope that we all can share in right now.

Why is it so comforting to see that in Eden itself, where sin and evil on earth began, the Lord started to reveal the plan of salvation?

Human Destiny

Read Genesis 3:15–24. As a result of the Fall, what happened to Adam and Eve?

While God’s judgment of the serpent is explicitly identified as a curse (*Gen. 3:14*), God’s judgment of the woman and of the man is not. The only time the word “curse” is used again is when it is applied to the “ground” (*Gen. 3:17*). That is, God had other plans for the man and the woman, as opposed to the serpent. They were offered a hope not offered to him.

Because the woman’s sin is due to her association with the serpent, the verse describing God’s judgment of the woman was related to the judgment of the serpent. Not only does Genesis 3:16 immediately follow Genesis 3:15, but the parallels between the two prophecies also clearly indicate that the prophecy concerning the woman in Genesis 3:16 has to be read in connection to the Messianic prophecy in Genesis 3:15. God’s judgment of the woman, including childbearing, should therefore be understood in the positive perspective of salvation (*compare with 1 Tim. 2:14, 15*).

Because the man’s sin is due to listening to the woman instead of listening to God, the ground from which man has been taken is cursed (*Gen. 3:17*). As a result, man will have to work hard (*Gen. 3:17–19*), and he will then “‘return’ ” to the ground where he comes from (*Gen. 3:19*), something that never should have happened and that was never part of God’s original plan.

It is significant that against this hopeless prospect of death Adam turns, then, to the woman, where he sees the hope of life through her giving birth (*Gen. 3:20*). That is, even amid the sentence of death, he sees the hope of life.

As any loving parent, God had wanted only good for them, not evil. But now that they knew evil, God was going to do all that He could to save them from it. Thus, even amid these judgments, all hope was not lost for our first parents, despite their open and blatant disobedience to God; even though they—living truly in paradise—had absolutely no reason to doubt God, to doubt God’s words, or to doubt His love for them.

Though we tend to think of “knowledge” in and of itself as good, why is that not always the case? What are some things that we are better off not knowing?

Further Thought: Consider the connection between “the tree of life” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This relation already is suggested through the fact that they are both located “in the midst of the Garden” (*Gen. 2:9*). But there is more between the two trees than just a geographical relation. It is because humans have taken the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because they disobeyed God, that they lost access to the tree of life and could not live forever, at least in this condition. This connection underlies a profound principle. Moral and spiritual choices have an impact on biological life, as Solomon instructed his son: “Do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you” (*Prov. 3:1, 2, NKJV*). This connection reappears in the future heavenly Jerusalem, where only the tree of life is present “in the middle of its street” (*Rev. 22:2, NKJV*).

“When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each other; and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting. But after Eve’s sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse. In many cases the curse has made the lot of woman very grievous and her life a burden. The superiority which God has given man he has abused in many respects by exercising arbitrary power. Infinite wisdom devised the plan of redemption, which places the race on a second probation by giving them another trial.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 484.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 God confronted Adam in Eden and asked him questions in order not only to establish his guilt but also to lead him to repentance. This motif reappears with Cain (*Gen. 4:9, 10*), the Flood (*Gen. 6:5–8*), the Tower of Babel (*Gen. 11:5*), and Sodom and Gomorrah (*Gen. 18:21*). How is the idea of an investigative judgment revealed in these incidents?
- 2 Why did Eve think that eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would give her wisdom? How could we avoid, in our context, making a similar mistake; that is, openly defying God’s Word in hope of something “better” than what God has offered us?

Forgiven in Prison: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The volunteers chose slips of paper with the names of inmates who had signed up for Bible studies at a prison in Spain. But nobody took one slip of paper. “Doesn’t anyone want to meet with this man?” asked Dante Marvin Herrmann, a 36-year-old theology student at Sagunto Adventist College.

“He’s too difficult to work with,” said one volunteer.

“He always mocks God,” said another.

Dante prayed and sensed a still, small voice say, “Go visit Matías.”

A prison guard brought Matías, a young, clean-shaven man, to Dante in an empty dining hall of the prison’s maximum-security block. Unlike the serial killers and other hardened convicts locked up in the block, Matías didn’t have any visible tattoos or an angry scowl on his face.

“You don’t look like the other prisoners,” Dante said.

Matías laughed. “You don’t know who I am,” he said.

“I don’t really care who you are or what you did,” Dante said. “We all have made mistakes in our lives, and we can’t change the past.”

Matías took a close look at Dante. He saw blue tattoos covering his arms and stretched-out holes in his earlobes left by body piercing.

“Are you from the Seventh-day Adventist Church?” Matías asked. “You don’t look like the other Adventists.”

“God can change every one of us,” Dante replied. He told how he had sold his soul to the devil at 17, joined a street gang, and worked as a drug dealer before finding the love of God in the Bible and becoming an Adventist. When he finished, the hour allotted for Bible study was up.

“Can you visit me again, please?” the inmate asked. “I want to learn about this unknown God whom you spoke about. I’ve never heard about a loving God. I’ve only heard about an angry, condemning God.”

Dante promised to return the next Sabbath. Back at the college, Dante mentioned Matías to a teacher. “Do you know who he is?” the teacher asked. When Dante shook his head, the teacher suggested he do an online news search. The online search prompted Dante to pray. “God, this is very serious,” he said. “Why did you send me to him?” He sensed a still, small voice reply, “Dante, I have grace for you. I have forgiven you. I can forgive him too.”

This mission story, which concludes next week, illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan, “To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org. The inmate’s name has been changed.



Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

Cain and His Legacy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 4, Heb. 11:4, Mic. 6:7, Isa. 1:11, 1 Cor. 10:13, 1 John 3:12, Genesis 5, Gen. 6:1–5.*

Memory Text: “ ‘If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it’ ” (*Genesis 4:7, NKJV*).

In Genesis, what follow immediately after the Fall, and then the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, are mainly births and deaths, all in fulfillment of God's prophecies in the preceding chapter. As parallel chapters, Genesis 3 and 4 contain many common themes and words: descriptions of sin (*Gen. 3:6–8; compare with Gen. 4:8*), curses from the 'adamah, "ground" (*Gen. 3:17; compare with Gen. 4:11*), and expulsion (*Gen. 3:24; compare with Gen. 4:12, 16*).

The reason for these parallels is to highlight the fulfillment of what went on before, the prophecies and predictions that God had given to Adam and Eve after the Fall. The first event after Adam's expulsion is full of hope; it is the birth of the first son, an event that Eve sees as the fulfillment of the promise that she heard in the Messianic prophecy (*Gen. 3:15*). That is, she thought he could be the promised Messiah.

The next events—the crime of Cain, the crime of Lamech, the decreasing life span, and the increasing wickedness—are all fulfillments of the curse uttered in Genesis 3.

Yet, even then, all hope is not lost.

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

Cain and Abel

Read Genesis 4:1, 2. What do we learn from these passages about the births of the two males?

The first event recorded by the biblical author immediately after Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is a birth. In the Hebrew phrase in Genesis 4:1, the words "the LORD" (*YHWH*) are directly linked to the words "a man," as the following literal translation indicates: " 'I have acquired a man, indeed the LORD Himself.' " It is rendered by the International Standard Version as " 'I have given birth to a male child—the LORD.' "

This literal translation suggests that Eve remembers the Messianic prophecy of Genesis 3:15 and believes that she has given birth to her Savior, the LORD. "The Saviour's coming was foretold in Eden. When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 31.

In fact, Cain occupies most of the story. He not only is the firstborn, a son that the parents almost "worshiped"; but in the chapter, he also is the only brother who, in the Genesis text, speaks. While Eve excitedly comments on Cain's birth, she says nothing at Abel's, at least nothing that is recorded in the text, in contrast to the birth of Cain. The narrator simply reports that she "bore again" (*Gen. 4:2, NKJV*).

The name Cain itself is derived from the Hebrew verb *qanah*, which means "to acquire" and denotes the acquisition, the possession of something precious and powerful. On the other hand, the Hebrew name *Hebel*, in English Abel, means "vapor" (*Ps. 62:9, NKJV*), or "breath" (*Ps. 144:4, NKJV*) and denotes elusiveness, emptiness, lack of substance; the same word, *hebel* (Abel), is used repeatedly in Ecclesiastes for "vanity." Though we don't want to read more into these short texts than is there, perhaps the idea is that Adam and Eve's hope rested, they believed, only in Cain, because they believed he, not his brother, was the promised Messiah.

What are things in life that, truly, are *hebel*, but that we treat as if they mattered much more than they do? Why is it important to know the difference between what matters and what doesn't?

The Two Offerings

The contrast between Cain and Abel, as reflected in their names, did not just concern their personalities; it also was manifested in their respective occupations. While Cain was “a tiller of the ground” (*Gen. 4:2, NKJV*), a profession requiring physical hard work, Abel was “a keeper of sheep” (*Gen. 4:2, NKJV*), a profession implying sensitivity and compassion.

Cain was the producer of the fruit of the ground, Abel the keeper of the sheep. These two occupations not only explain the nature of the two offerings (fruit of the ground from Cain and a sheep from Abel), but they also account for the two different psychological attitudes and mentalities associated with the two offerings: Cain was working to “acquire” the fruit he would produce, while Abel was careful to “keep” the sheep he had received.

Read Genesis 4:1–5 and Hebrews 11:4. Why did God accept Abel’s offering and reject Cain’s offering? How are we to understand what happened here?

“Without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin; and they [Cain and Abel] were to show their faith in the blood of Christ as the promised atonement by offering the firstlings of the flock in sacrifice. Besides this, the first fruits of the earth were to be presented before the Lord as a thank offering.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 71.

While Abel complied with God’s instructions and offered the vegetable offering in addition to the animal burnt offering, Cain neglected to do so. He didn’t bring an animal to be sacrificed, but only an offering of “the fruit of the ground.” It was an act of open disobedience, in contrast to the attitude of his brother. Often, this story has been viewed as a classic case of salvation by faith (Abel and his blood offering) in contrast to an attempt to earn salvation by works (Cain and his fruit of the ground).

Although these offerings must have had spiritual significance, they did not have any magic value in themselves. They were always merely symbols, images, pointing to the God who provided the sinner not only sustenance but also redemption.

Read Micah 6:7 and Isaiah 1:11. How can we take the principle applied in these texts and apply it to our lives and worship?

The Crime

Read Genesis 4:3–8. What is the process that led Cain to kill his brother? See also 1 John 3:12.

Cain's reaction is twofold: "Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell" (*Gen. 4:5, NKJV*). Cain's anger was directed, it appears, at God and at Abel. Cain was angry with God because he thought that he was the victim of an injustice and angry with Abel because he was jealous of his brother. Jealous of what? Just the offering? Certainly, more was going on behind the scenes than what is revealed in these few texts. Whatever the issues, Cain was depressed because his offering had not been accepted.

God's two questions in Genesis 4:6 are related to Cain's two conditions. Note that God does not accuse Cain. As with Adam, God asks questions, not because He doesn't know the answers, but because He wants Cain to look at himself and then understand the reason for his own condition. As always, the Lord seeks to redeem His fallen people, even when they openly fail Him. Then, after asking these questions, God counsels Cain.

First, God urges Cain to "do well," to behave the right way. It is a call for repentance and a change of attitude. God promises Cain that he will be "accepted" and forgiven. In a sense He is saying that Cain can have acceptance with God, but it must be done on God's terms, not Cain's.

On the other hand, "if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (*Gen. 4:7, NKJV*). God's counsel has revealed the root of sin, and it is found in Cain himself. Here, again, God is counseling Cain, seeking to guide him in the way he should go.

God's second word of counsel concerns the attitude to take toward this sin, which lies at the door and whose "desire is for you." God recommends self-control: "You should rule over it." The same principle resonates in James, when he explains that "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (*James 1:14, NKJV*). The gospel offers us the promise not only of the forgiveness of sin but also victory over it. (*See 1 Cor. 10:13.*) In the end, Cain had no one to blame for his sin but himself. Isn't it generally that way with all of us, as well?

What does this unfortunate story teach us about free will and how God will not force us to obey?

The Punishment of Cain

Read Genesis 4:9–16. Why does God ask the question, “ ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ ” What is the connection between Cain’s sin and him becoming “ ‘a fugitive and a vagabond . . . on the earth’ ” (*Gen. 4:12, NKJV*)?

God’s question to Cain echoes His question to Adam in Eden: “ ‘Where are you?’ ” This echo suggests the link between the sin in Eden and this sin now: the latter sin (Cain’s) was the result of the former one (Adam’s).

Cain, though, will not acknowledge his sin; he denies it, something that Adam didn’t do, even though he tried to put the blame elsewhere. Cain, in contrast, openly defies God, who doesn’t waste any time confronting Cain with his crime. When God asks the third question, “ ‘What have you done?’ ” He does not even wait for an answer. He reminds Cain that He knows everything, for the voice of Abel’s blood has reached Him from the ground (*Gen. 4:10*), an image that signifies that God knows about the murder and will respond to it. Abel is in the ground, a direct link back to the Fall and to what the Lord has said would happen to Adam (*see Gen. 3:19*).

Read Genesis 4:14. What is the significance of Cain’s words that “ ‘I shall be hidden from Your face’ ” (*NKJV*)?

It is because Abel’s blood was poured on the ground that the ground is now cursed, again (*Gen. 4:12*). As a result, Cain is then condemned to become a refugee, far from God. Only when Cain hears God’s sentence does he acknowledge the significance of God’s presence; for without it, he fears for his own life. Even after Cain’s cold-blooded murder of his brother and his defiance in the face of it, the Lord still shows mercy to him, and even though “Cain went out from the presence of the LORD” (*Gen. 4:16, NKJV*), the Lord still provided him with some kind of protection. Exactly what that “mark” was (*Gen. 4:15*), we haven’t been told, but whatever it was, it came only because of God’s grace to him.

“ ‘Hidden from Your face’ ” (*Gen. 4:14, NKJV*)—what is hidden from the face of God? What a tragic situation for anyone. What is the only way that we, as sinners, can avoid that situation?

The Wickedness of Man

Read Genesis 4:17–24. What was Cain’s legacy, and how did Cain’s crime open the way for the increasing wickedness of humankind?

Cain’s great-great-great grandson, Lamech, refers to Cain’s crime in the context of his own. This comparison between the crime of Cain and the crime of Lamech is instructive. While Cain keeps silent about his only recorded crime, Lamech seems to be boasting about his, expressing it in a song (*Gen. 4:23, 24*). While Cain asks for God’s mercy, Lamech is not recorded as asking for it. While Cain is avenged seven times by God, Lamech believes that he will be avenged seventy-seven times (*see Gen. 4:24*), a hint that he’s very much aware of his guilt.

Also, Cain is monogamous (*Gen. 4:17*); Lamech introduces polygamy, for the Scripture says specifically that he “took for himself two wives” (*Gen. 4:19, NKJV*). This intensification and exaltation of evil will definitely affect the next generations of Cainites.

Following immediately this episode of evil in the Cainite family, the biblical text records a new event that counters the Cainite trend. “Adam knew his wife” (*Gen. 4:25*), and the result is the birth of Seth, whose name is given by Eve to indicate that God had put “another seed” in the place of Abel.

In fact, the history of the name Seth precedes Abel. The name Seth is derived from the Hebrew verb *’ashit*, “I will put” (*Gen. 3:15*), which introduces the Messianic prophecy. The Messianic seed will be passed on in the Sethite line. The biblical text gives, then, the record of the Messianic line beginning with Seth (*Gen. 5:3*), and including Enoch (*Gen. 5:21*), Methuselah, and ending with Noah (*Gen. 6:8*).

The phrase “sons of God” (*Gen. 6:2*) refers to the line of Seth because they are designed to preserve the image of God (*Gen. 5:1, 4*). On the other hand, the “daughters of men” (*Gen. 6:2*) seems to have a negative connotation, contrasting the offspring of those in the image of God with those in the image of men. And it is under the influence of these “daughters of men” that the sons of God “took wives for themselves of all whom they chose” (*Gen. 6:2, NKJV*), indicating the wrong direction humanity was heading.

Read Genesis 6:1–5. What a powerful testimony to the corruption of sin! Why must we do all that we can through God’s power to eradicate sin from our lives?

Further Thought: The repeated phrase “Enoch walked with God” (*Gen. 5:22, 24*) means intimate and daily companionship with God. Enoch’s personal relationship with God was so special that “God took him” (*Gen. 5:24*). This last phrase is, however, unique in the genealogy of Adam and does not support the idea of an immediate afterlife in Paradise for those who “walk with God.” Note that Noah also walked with God (*Gen. 6:9*), and he died like all the other humans, including Adam and Methuselah. It also is interesting to note that no reason is given to justify this special grace. “Enoch became a preacher of righteousness, making known to the people what God had revealed to him. Those who feared the Lord sought out this holy man, to share his instruction and his prayers. He labored publicly also, bearing God’s messages to all who would hear the words of warning. His labors were not restricted to the Sethites. In the land where Cain had sought to flee from the divine Presence, the prophet of God made known the wonderful scenes that had passed before his vision. ‘Behold,’ he declared, ‘the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds.’ Jude 14, 15.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 86.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why did Cain kill his brother? Read the following comment by Elie Wiesel: “Why did he do it? Perhaps he wanted to remain alone: an only child and, after his parents’ death, the only man. Alone like God and perhaps alone in place of God. . . . Cain killed to become God. . . . Any man who takes himself for God ends up assassinating men.”—*Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 58. How can we be careful, even if we don’t commit murder, not to reflect the attitude of Cain?
- 2 Compare the life span of antediluvians (*Genesis 5*) to that of the patriarchs. How would we explain this decreasing of the span of human life? How does this degeneration counter the premises of modern Darwinism?

Forgiven in Prison: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The next Sabbath, inmate Matías greeted Dante, a 36-year-old theology student from Sagunto Adventist College, with a flurry of happy conversation at the prison in Spain. After several minutes, however, Matías abruptly changed his tone and began to fidget nervously. He spoke about his childhood and adult life. He described a years-long struggle over sinful desires.

“I don’t feel like I’ve done anything wrong,” he said. “When I leave prison, I’ll repeat what I did.” He stared at Dante, waiting to see his reaction.

Dante understood that he was being tested. Matías wanted to see whether he would reflect a condemning or a loving God. Dante prayed silently, “Jesus, give me Your grace. You forgave me, and You can forgive him.”

Matías, seeing that his visitor sat calmly, spoke again.

“What would you do to me if you caught me?” he asked.

Dante, still praying, answered slowly, “If God can give me grace and salvation, He can give you grace and salvation too.”

Shock twisted Matías’ face. “Aren’t you going to condemn me?” he asked.

Opening the Bible, Dante read, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (*Romans 7:19, 20; NJKV*). “We often don’t understand our actions,” he said. “We don’t do what we want to do, and we end up doing what we don’t want to do. Could it be that you don’t feel bad about your actions because you can’t control them?”

Matías grabbed the Bible from Dante’s hands and read the passage.

Dante turned to Romans 8:1, 2 and read, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

“God hasn’t condemned you,” Dante said. “He wants to help you, and He loves you all the time. You can live differently. You just have to let the Spirit of God live in you. He wants to help you just like He helped me.”

Deep sorrow filled Matías’ face. The scorn and contempt were gone. Dante understood that, for the first time, Matías was experiencing a deep sense of guilt.

Everything changed from that day. Matías stopped mocking God and the Bible.

“From that moment, I started to study the Bible with him,” Dante said in an interview. “From that moment, he wanted to change his life. He no longer wanted to continue in his old ways but to be on God’s side.”

Matías (not his real name) is among more than a dozen prisoners receiving Bible studies every Sabbath afternoon from Dante and nine other students from Sagunto Adventist College. Your Sabbath School mission offerings help Adventist educational institutions worldwide train students like Dante to share Jesus’ precious promise of grace and salvation to a sin-sick world. “If God can change my heart, God can change anybody’s heart,” Dante said.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

The Flood



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 6:13–7:10, 2 Pet. 2:5–9, Genesis 7, Rom. 6:1–6, Ps. 106:4, Genesis 8, Gen. 9:1–17.*

Memory Text: “ ‘But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be’ ”
(*Matthew 24:37, NKJV*).

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (*Gen. 6:5, NKJV*). The verb “saw” (*Gen. 6:5*) brings the reader back to each step of God’s initial Creation. But what God sees now, instead of *tov*, “good,” is *ra’*, “evil” (*Gen. 6:5*). It is as if God regretted that He had created the world, now full of *ra’* (*Gen. 6:6, 7*).

And yet, God’s regret contains elements of salvation, as well. The Hebrew word for “sorry” (*nakhm*) is echoed in the name of Noah (*Noakh*), which means “comfort” (*Gen. 5:29*). Thus, God’s response to this wickedness has two sides. It contains the threat of justice, leading to destruction for some; and yet, His response promises comfort and mercy, leading to salvation, as well, for others.

This “double voice” already was heard with Cain and Abel/Seth, and it was repeated through the contrast between the two lines of Seth (the “sons of God”) and Cain (the “sons of men”). Now we hear it again as God differentiates between Noah and the rest of humankind.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 23.

Preparation for the Flood

Read Genesis 6:13–7:10. What lesson can we learn from this amazing account of early human history?

Like Daniel, Noah is a prophet who predicts the end of the world. The Hebrew word for the “ark” (*tevah*) (*Gen. 6:14*) is the same rare Egyptian loanword that was used for the “ark,” in which the infant Moses was hidden, who was preserved in order to save Israel from Egypt (*Exod. 2:3*).

Also, some have seen in the general structure of the ark parallels to the ark of the tabernacle (*Exod. 25:10*). Just as the ark of the Flood will permit the survival of humankind, so the ark of the covenant, a sign of God’s presence in the midst of His people (*Exod. 25:22*), points to God’s work of salvation for His people.

The phrase “Noah did; according to all that God commanded” (*Gen. 6:22, NKJV*) concludes the preparatory section. The verb *‘asah*, “did,” referring to Noah’s action, responds to the verb *‘asah*, “make,” in God’s command, which began the section (*Gen. 6:14*) and is repeated five times (*Gen. 6:14–16*). This echo between God’s command and Noah’s response suggests Noah’s absolute obedience to what God had told him to do, to *‘asah*. It is interesting that this phrase also is used in the context of the building of the ark of the covenant (*Exod. 39:32, 42; Exod. 40:16*).

“God gave Noah the exact dimensions of the ark and explicit directions in regard to its construction in every particular. Human wisdom could not have devised a structure of so great strength and durability. God was the designer, and Noah the master builder.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 92.

Again, the parallel between the two “arks” reaffirms their common redemptive function. Noah’s obedience is thus described as a part of God’s plan of salvation. Noah was saved simply because he had that faith to do what God commanded him to do (*see Heb. 11:7*). He was an early example of a faith that manifests itself in obedience, the only kind of faith that matters (*James 2:20*).

In short, though Noah “found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (*Gen. 6:8*), it was in response to this grace, already given him, that Noah acted faithfully and obediently to God’s commands. Isn’t that how it should be with all of us?

Read 2 Peter 2:5–9. Why was only Noah’s family saved? What lesson can we learn from the Noah story regarding our role in warning the world about coming judgment?

The Event of the Flood

The verb *‘asah*, “make,” which refers to Noah’s actions, also is a keyword in the Genesis Creation account (*Gen. 1:7, 16, 25, 26, 31; Gen. 2:2*). Noah’s acts of obedience to God are like God’s acts of creation. What we can take from this link is that the Flood is not just about God punishing humanity, but about God saving us, as well.

Read Genesis 7. Why does the description of the Flood remind us of the Creation account? What lessons can we learn from the parallels between the two events?

An attentive reading of the text covering the Flood reveals the use of many common words and expressions within the Creation story: “seven” (*Gen. 7:2, 3, 4, 10; compare with Gen. 2:1–3*); “male and female” (*Gen. 7:2, 3, 9, 16; compare with Gen. 1:27*); “after its kind” (*Gen. 7:14, NKJV; compare with Gen. 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25*); “beasts,” “birds,” “creeping things” (*see Gen. 7:8, 14, 21, 23; compare with Gen. 1:24, 25*); and “breath of life” (*Gen. 7:15, 22; compare with Gen. 2:7*).

The Flood story reads, then, somewhat like the Creation story. These echoes of the Creation accounts help reveal that the God who creates is the same as the God who destroys (*Deut. 32:39*). But these echoes also convey a message of hope: the Flood is designed to be a new creation, out of the waters, which leads to a new existence.

The movement of waters shows that this event of creation is, in fact, reversing the act of Creation in Genesis 1. In contrast to Genesis 1, which describes a separation of the waters above from the waters below (*Gen. 1:7*), the Flood involves their reunification as they explode beyond their borders (*Gen. 7:11*).

This process conveys a paradoxical message: God has to destroy what is before in order to allow for a new creation afterward. The creation of the new earth requires the destruction of the old one. The event of the Flood prefigures the future salvation of the world at the end of time: “‘I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away’ ” (*Rev. 21:1, NKJV; compare with Isa. 65:17*).

What in us needs to be destroyed in order to be created anew? (*See Rom. 6:1–6.*)

The End of the Flood

Genesis 7:22–24 describes the overwhelming and comprehensive effect of the waters, which “destroyed all living things” (*Gen. 7:23, NKJV*) and “prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days” (*Gen. 7:24, NKJV*). It is against this background of total annihilation and hopelessness that “God remembered” (*Gen. 8:1*). This phrase is situated in the center of the texts covering the Flood, an indication that this idea is the central message of the Flood story.

Read Genesis 8:1. What does it mean that God “remembered” Noah?

The verb *zakhar*, “remember,” means that God had not forgotten; it is more than just a mental exercise. In the biblical context, the “God who remembers” means the fulfillment of His promise and often refers to salvation (*see Gen. 19:29*). In the context of the Flood, “God remembered” means that the waters “stopped” (*Gen. 8:2*) and that Noah will soon be able to leave the ark (*Gen. 8:16*).

Though no direct command is yet given to leave, Noah takes the initiative and sends first a raven, and then a dove, to test the situation. Finally, when the dove does not come back, he understands “that the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked” (*Gen. 8:13, NKJV*).

Noah’s behavior is rich in practical lessons. On one hand, it teaches us to trust God even though He does not yet directly speak; on the other hand, faith does not deny the value of thinking and testing. Faith does not exclude the duty to think, to seek, and to see if what we learned is true.

And yet, Noah goes out only when God, finally, tells him to do so (*Gen. 8:15–19*). That is, even when he knows it’s safe to leave, Noah still relies on God and waits for God’s signal before going out of the ark. He waited patiently within the ark. “As he had entered at God’s command, he waited for special directions to depart. . . . At last an angel descended from heaven, opened the massive door, and bade the patriarch and his household go forth upon the earth and take with them every living thing.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 105.

Read Genesis 8:1, Genesis 19:29, and Psalm 106:4. What does the expression “God remembers” mean? What does this truth mean for us, now—that is, how has God shown you that He “remembers” you?

The Covenant: Part 1

Now it was the moment when the promised covenant was to be fulfilled. “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” (*Gen. 6:18, NKJV*). In contrast to the divine threat to destroy (*Gen. 6:17*), this covenant was the promise of life.

Read Genesis 8:20. What did Noah do first when he went out of the ark, and why?

Like Adam and Eve, who surely worshiped God on Sabbath immediately after the six days of Creation, Noah worshiped God immediately after the Flood, another creation event in and of itself. There is a difference, however, between the two acts of worship. Unlike Adam and Eve, who worshiped the Lord directly, Noah had to resort to a sacrifice. This is the first mention in the Scriptures of an altar. The sacrifice is a “burnt offering” (*olah*), the oldest and most frequent sacrifice. For Noah, this sacrifice was a thanksgiving offering (*compare with Num. 15:1–11*), given in order to express his gratefulness to the Creator, who had saved him.

Read Genesis 9:2–4. How did the Flood affect the human diet? What is the principle behind God’s restrictions?

Because of the effect of the Flood, plant food was no longer available as it used to be. Therefore, God allowed humans to eat animal flesh. This change of diet generated a change in the relationship between humans and animals, in contrast to what had been between them in the original creation. In the Creation account, humans and animals shared the same plant diet and did not threaten each other. In the post-Flood world, the killing of animals for food entailed a relationship of fear and dread (*Gen. 9:2*). Once they started eating each other, humans and animals, no doubt, developed a relationship quite different from what they had enjoyed in Eden.

God’s tolerance, however, had two restrictions. First, not all the animals were proper for food. The first restriction was implicit in the distinction between “clean and unclean” animals, which was a part of the Creation order (*see Gen. 8:19, 20; compare with Gen. 1:21, 24*). The second one, which was explicit and new, was to abstain from the consumption of blood, for life is in the blood (*Gen. 9:4*).

The Covenant: Part 2

Read Genesis 8:21–9:1. What is the significance of God’s commitment to the preservation of life? How does God’s blessing fulfill that commitment?

God’s commitment to preserve life was an act of grace; it was not a result of human merits. God decided to preserve life on earth in spite of human evil (*Gen. 8:21*). Genesis 8:22 reads, literally, “all the days of the earth” (*DRA*); that is, for as long as this present earth remains, the seasons will come and go and life will be sustained. In short, God has not given up on His creation.

In fact, the following text, which talks about God’s blessing, takes us back to the original Creation, with its blessing (*Gen. 1:22, 28; Gen. 2:3*). The Lord, in a sense, was giving humanity a chance to start over, to start fresh.

Read Genesis 9:8–17. What is the significance of the rainbow? How does this “‘sign of the covenant’” (*Gen. 9:13, NKJV*) relate to the other sign of the covenant, the Sabbath?

The phrase “establish . . . covenant” is repeated three times (*Gen. 9:9, 11, 17*), marking the climax and fulfillment of God’s initial promise (*Gen. 6:18*). Following the preceding section, which parallels the sixth day of the Creation account, this section parallels the section covering the seventh day of the Creation account, the Sabbath. Inside the text, the repetition, seven times, of the word “covenant” resonates with the Sabbath. Like the Sabbath, the rainbow is the sign of the covenant (*Gen. 9:13, 14, 16; compare with Exod. 31:12–17*). Also, like the Sabbath, the rainbow has a universal scope; it applies to the whole world. Just as the Sabbath, as a sign of Creation, is for everyone, everywhere, the promise that no other worldwide flood will come is for everyone, everywhere, as well.

Next time you see a rainbow, think about all of God’s promises to us. Why can we trust those promises, and how does the rainbow show us that we can trust them?

Further Thought: A comparison between the mentality and the behavior of the people and the state of the world before the Flood and that of the people in our days is particularly instructive. To be sure, human wickedness is not a new phenomenon. Look at the parallels between their time and ours.

“The sins that called for vengeance upon the antediluvian world exist today. The fear of God is banished from the hearts of men, and His law is treated with indifference and contempt. The intense worldliness of that generation is equaled by that of the generation now living. . . . God did not condemn the antediluvians for eating and drinking. . . . Their sin consisted in taking these gifts without gratitude to the Giver, and debasing themselves by indulging appetite without restraint. It was lawful for them to marry. Marriage was in God’s order; it was one of the first institutions which He established. He gave special directions concerning this ordinance, clothing it with sanctity and beauty; but these directions were forgotten, and marriage was perverted and made to minister to passion. A similar condition of things exists now. That which is lawful in itself is carried to excess. . . . Fraud and bribery and theft stalk unrebuked in high places and in low. The issues of the press teem with records of murder. . . . The spirit of anarchy is permeating all nations, and the outbreaks that from time to time excite the horror of the world are but indications of the pent-up fires of passion and lawlessness that, having once escaped control, will fill the earth with woe and desolation. The picture which Inspiration has given of the antediluvian world represents too truly the condition to which modern society is fast hastening. Even now, in the present century, and in professedly Christian lands, there are crimes daily perpetrated as black and terrible as those for which the old-world sinners were destroyed.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 101, 102.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are the common characteristics of the pre-Flood society and ours? What do these common characteristics teach us about God’s grace, that, despite all this, He loves the world and is, still, seeking to save whom He can?
- 2 Some people argue that Noah’s flood was only a local event. What is wrong with that idea? If this were true, why would every local flood (and every rainbow) make God a liar?

Faithful Grandparents

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

In the evening, after it was too dark to work in the maize field, the Reyneke family gathered around a large kitchen table for supper in their small farmhouse in central South Africa. Father, Mother, and their seven boys and four girls ate homegrown food every evening: maize porridge along with potatoes, pumpkin, and meat. Afterward, the children cleared away the dishes, and Father opened his Dutch Bible for family worship.

On this particular evening, Father opened the Bible to Exodus 20 and read, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work” (*Exodus 20:8–10, NKJV*).

“Listen,” Father said, puzzled. “It says here, ‘Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest.’ ” The idea of resting on the seventh day was new to him. He and the family had always observed the first day, Sunday, as the Sabbath, but the Bible said otherwise.

Father made a note in the margin of his Bible. Beside the words “Six days you shall labor” he wrote, “Plow time.” Beside the words “On the seventh day you shall rest” he wrote, “Rest time.” The matter was clear to him. His family started keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. Families took notice on the neighboring farms, and soon three of them also were keeping the Sabbath.

Time passed, and a Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelist stopped by the farm and sold Father a little Dutch-language book titled *God’s Covenant With Man*.

Through the book, Father and Mother learned about the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the first time. They understood that other people also worshiped on the seventh-day Sabbath.

While there is no historical record of Father and Mother joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church, four of their 11 children became Adventists. One of their grandsons is Gideon Reyneke, a pastor who helps oversee mission work in South Africa and 14 other countries as executive secretary of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division.

Gideon said he owes his Adventist heritage to faithful grandparents who simply read the Bible and obeyed it in the 1920s. “We pray that by telling this story from generation to generation, it will yield results and bring many more people to Jesus Christ,” he said.

This quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help spread the gospel in Gideon Reyneke’s home Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division. Thank you for planning a generous offering.



Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

All Nations *and* Babel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 9:18–11:9, Luke 10:1, Matt. 1:1–17, Luke 1:26–33, Ps. 139:7–12, Gen. 1:28, Gen. 9:1.*

Memory Text: “Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (*Genesis 11:9, NKJV*).

After the Flood, the biblical account shifts from a focus on the single individual, Noah, to his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The particular attention on Ham, the father of Canaan (*Gen. 10:6, 15*), introduces the idea of “Canaan,” the Promised Land (*Gen. 12:5*), an anticipation of Abraham, whose blessing will go to all nations (*Gen. 12:3*).

However, the line is broken by the Tower of Babel (*Gen. 11:1–9*). Once again, God's plans for humankind are disrupted. What was supposed to be a blessing, the birth of all nations, becomes another occasion for another curse. The nations unite in order to try to take God's place; God responds in judgment on them; and, through the resulting confusion, the people get scattered throughout the world (*Gen. 11:8*), thus fulfilling God's original plan to “fill the earth” (*Gen. 9:1, NKJV*).

In the end, in spite of human wickedness, God turns evil into good; He has, as always, the last word. The curse of Ham in his father's tent (*Gen. 9:21, 22*) and the curse of the confused nations at the Tower of Babel (*Gen. 11:9*) will, eventually, be turned into a blessing for the nations.

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

The Curse of Ham

Read Genesis 9:18–27. What is the message of this strange story?

Noah's act in his vineyard echoes Adam's in the Garden of Eden. The two stories contain common motifs: eating of the fruit, resulting in nakedness; then a covering, a curse, and a blessing. Noah reconnects with his Adamic roots and, unfortunately, continues that failed history.

The fermentation of fruit was not a part of God's original creation. Noah indulged, then lost self-control and uncovered himself. The fact that Ham "saw" his nakedness hints at Eve, who also "saw" the forbidden tree (*Gen. 3:6*). This parallel suggests that Ham did not just "see" furtively, by accident, his father's nakedness. He went around and talked about it, without even trying to take care of his father's problem. In contrast, his brothers' immediate reaction to cover their father, while Ham left him naked, implicitly denounced Ham's actions.

The issue at stake here is more about the respect of one's parents. Failure to honor your parents, who represent your past, will affect your future (*Exod. 20:12; compare with Eph. 6:2*). Hence the curse, which will influence Ham's future and that of his son Canaan.

Of course, it is a gross theological mistake and an ethical crime to use this text to justify racist theories against anyone. The prophecy is restricted to Canaan, Ham's son. The biblical author has in mind some of the corrupt practices of the Canaanites (*Gen. 19:5–7, 31–35*).

In addition, the curse contains a promise of blessing, playing on the name "Canaan," which is derived from the verb *kana*, meaning "subdue." It is through the subduing of Canaan that God's people, the descendants of Shem, will enter the Promised Land and prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, who will enlarge Japheth "in the tents of Shem" (*Gen. 9:27*). This is a prophetic allusion to the expansion of God's covenant to all nations, which will embrace Israel's message of salvation to the world (*Dan. 9:27, Isa. 66:18–20, Rom. 11:25*). The curse of Ham will, in fact, be a blessing for all nations, including whichever descendants of Ham and Canaan accept the salvation offered them by the Lord.

Noah, the "hero" of the Flood, drunk? What should this tell us about how flawed we all are and why we need God's grace every moment of our lives?

The Genesis Genealogy

The chronological information about Noah's age makes us realize that Noah serves as a link between the pre-Flood and the post-Flood civilizations. The last two verses of the preceding story (*Gen. 9:28, 29*) take us back to the last link of the genealogy of Adam (*Gen. 5:32*). Because Adam died when Lamech, Noah's father, was 56 years old, Noah must surely have heard stories about Adam, which he could have transmitted to his descendants before and after the Flood.

Read Genesis 10. What is the purpose of this genealogy in the Bible? (See also Luke 3:23–38.)

The biblical genealogy has three functions. First, it emphasizes the historical nature of the biblical events, which are related to real people who lived and died and whose days are precisely numbered. Second, it demonstrates the continuity from antiquity to the contemporary time of the writer, establishing a clear link from the past to the "present." Third, it reminds us of human fragility and of the tragic effect of sin's curse and its deadly results on all the generations that have followed.

Note that the classification of "Hamite," "Semite," and "Japhethite" does not follow clear criteria. The 70 nations foreshadow the 70 members of the family of Jacob (*Gen. 46:27*) and the 70 elders of Israel in the wilderness (*Exod. 24:9*). The idea of a correspondence between the 70 nations and the 70 elders suggests the mission of Israel toward the nations: "When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel" (*Deut. 32:8, NKJV*). Along the same line, Jesus sends 70 disciples to evangelize (*Luke 10:1*).

What this information shows us is the direct link between Adam and the patriarchs; they all are historical figures, real people from Adam onward. This also helps us understand that the patriarchs had direct access to witnesses who had personal memories of these ancient events.

Read Matthew 1:1–17. What does this teach us about how historical all these people were? Why is knowing and believing that they were real people important for our faith?

One Language

Read Genesis 11:1–4. Why were the people of “the whole earth” so keen to achieve unity?

The phrase “the whole earth” refers to a small number of people, those alive after the Flood. The reason for this gathering is clearly indicated: they want to build a tower to reach the heavens (*Gen. 11:4*). In fact, their real intention is to take the place of God Himself, the Creator. Significantly, the description of the people’s intentions and actions echo God’s intentions and actions in the Creation account: “they said” (*Gen. 11:3, 4; compare with Gen. 1:6, 9, 14, etc.*); “let us make” (*Gen. 11:3, 4; compare with Gen. 1:26*). Their intention is explicitly stated: “ ‘Let us make a name for ourselves’ ” (*Gen. 11:4, NKJV*), an expression that is exclusively used for God (*Isa. 63:12, 14*).

In short, the builders of Babel entertained the misplaced ambition to replace God, the Creator. (We know who inspired that, don’t we? *See Isa. 14:14.*) The memory of the Flood surely must have played a role in their project. They built a high tower in order to survive another flood, were another to come, despite God’s promise. The memory of the Flood has been preserved in Babylonian tradition, albeit distorted, in connection with the construction of the city of Babel (Babylon). This upward effort to reach heaven and usurp God will, indeed, characterize the spirit of Babylon.

This is why the story of the Tower of Babel is such an important motif in the book of Daniel, as well. The reference to Shinar, which introduces the story of the Tower of Babel (*Gen. 11:2*), reappears at the beginning of the book of Daniel, in order to designate the place where Nebuchadnezzar has brought the articles of the temple of Jerusalem (*Dan. 1:2*). Among many other passages of the book, the episode of Nebuchadnezzar’s erecting the golden statue, probably on the same place in the same “plain,” is the most illustrative of this frame of mind. In his visions of the end, Daniel sees the same scenario of the nations of the earth gathering together to achieve unity against God (*Dan. 2:43, Dan. 11:43–45; compare with Rev. 16:14–16*), though this attempt fails here, as it did at Babel, as well.

A famous secular French writer in the past century said the great purpose of humanity was to try “to be God.” What is it about us, starting with Eve in Eden (*Gen. 3:5*), that gets drawn into this dangerous lie?

“Let Us Go Down”

Read Genesis 11:5–7 and Psalm 139:7–12. Why did God come down to the earth here? What was the event that motivated this divine reaction?

Ironically, although the men were going up, God had to come down to them. The descent of God is an affirmation of His supremacy. God will always be beyond our human reach. Any human effort to rise up to Him and to meet Him in heaven is useless and ridiculous. No question, that’s why, in order to save us, Jesus came down to us; there was, indeed, no other way for Him to save us.

A great irony in the Tower of Babel account is seen in God’s statement: “to see the city and the tower” (*Gen. 11:5*). God did not have to come down to see (*Ps. 139:7–12; compare with Ps. 2:4*), but He did so anyway. The concept emphasizes God’s involvement with humanity.

Read Luke 1:26–33. What does this teach us about God’s coming down to us?

The descent of God reminds us also of the principle of righteousness by faith and of the process of God’s grace. Whatever work we may perform for God, He will still have to come down to meet with us. It is not what we do for God that will bring us to Him and to redemption. Instead, it is God’s move toward us that will save us. In fact, the text in Genesis talks twice about God going “down,” which seems to imply how much He cared about what was happening there.

According to the text, the Lord wanted to put an end to the people’s deep-seated unity, which—given their fallen state—could lead only to more and more evil. That’s why He chose to confuse their languages, which would bring an end to their united schemes.

“The schemes of the Babel builders ended in shame and defeat. The monument to their pride became the memorial of their folly. Yet men are continually pursuing the same course—depending upon self, and rejecting God’s law. It is the principle that Satan tried to carry out in heaven; the same that governed Cain in presenting his offering.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 123.

How do we see in the Tower of Babel account another example of human hubris and how, ultimately, it will fail? What personal lessons can we take from this story?

The Redemption of the Exile

Read Genesis 11:8, 9 and Genesis 9:1; compare these with Genesis 1:28. Why is God's dispersion redemptive?

God's design and blessing for humans was that they would " 'multiply, and fill the earth' " (*Gen. 9:1, NKJV; compare with Gen. 1:28, NKJV*). Against God's plan, the builders of Babel preferred to stick together as the same people. One reason they said they wanted to build the city was so that they would not " 'be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth' " (*Gen. 11:4, NKJV*). They refused to move elsewhere, perhaps thinking that together they would be more powerful than they would be separated and scattered. And, in one sense, they were right.

Unfortunately, they sought to use their united power for evil, not good. They wanted to " 'make a name for ourselves,' " a powerful reflection of their own arrogance and pride. Indeed, whenever humans, in open defiance of God, want to " 'make a name' " for themselves, we can be sure it won't turn out well. It never has.

Hence, in a judgment against their outright defiance, God scattered them across "the face of all the earth" (*Gen. 11:9*), exactly what they didn't want to happen.

Interestingly enough, the name Babel, which means "door of God," is related to the verb *balal*, which means "confuse" (*Gen. 11:9*). It is because they wanted to reach the "door" of God, because they thought of themselves as God, that they ended up confused and much less powerful than before.

"The men of Babel had determined to establish a government that should be independent of God. There were some among them, however, who feared the Lord, but who had been deceived by the pretensions of the ungodly and drawn into their schemes. For the sake of these faithful ones the Lord delayed His judgments and gave the people time to reveal their true character. As this was developed, the sons of God labored to turn them from their purpose; but the people were fully united in their Heaven-daring undertaking. Had they gone on unchecked, they would have demoralized the world in its infancy. Their confederacy was founded in rebellion; a kingdom established for self-exaltation, but in which God was to have no rule or honor."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 123.

Why must we be very careful about seeking to "make a name" for ourselves?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Tower of Babel,” pp. 117–124, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“They decided to build a city, and in it a tower of such stupendous height. . . . These enterprises were designed to prevent the people from scattering abroad in colonies. God had directed men to disperse throughout the earth, to replenish and subdue it; but these Babel builders determined to keep their community united in one body, and to found a monarchy that should eventually embrace the whole earth. Thus their city would become the metropolis of a universal empire; its glory would command the admiration and homage of the world and render the founders illustrious. The magnificent tower, reaching to the heavens, was intended to stand as a monument of the power and wisdom of its builders, perpetuating their fame to the latest generations.

“The dwellers on the plain of Shinar disbelieved God’s covenant that He would not again bring a flood upon the earth. Many of them denied the existence of God and attributed the Flood to the operation of natural causes. Others believed in a Supreme Being, and that it was He who had destroyed the antediluvian world; and their hearts, like that of Cain, rose up in rebellion against Him. One object before them in the erection of the tower was to secure their own safety in case of another deluge. By carrying the structure to a much greater height than was reached by the waters of the Flood, they thought to place themselves beyond all possibility of danger. And as they would be able to ascend to the region of the clouds, they hoped to ascertain the cause of the Flood. The whole undertaking was designed to exalt still further the pride of its projectors and to turn the minds of future generations away from God and lead them into idolatry.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 118, 119.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What example do we have from history, or even the present, of the trouble that can come from those who seek to make a name for themselves?
- 2 How can we, as a church, avoid the danger of seeking to build our own Tower of Babel? What are ways we might actually be seeking to do this, even subconsciously?

Miracle in UAE

By GURENI LUKWARO

Pradeep Liyanage hadn't really thought about Jesus until his son joined a Pathfinder club in the United Arab Emirates. The 13-year-old boy came home filled with joy about the Bible stories that he heard at the club. As Pradeep and his wife saw the boy's enthusiasm and listened to the stories, a desire grew in them to know more, and they started to study the Bible with Muyi Oyinloye, pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Sharjah.

The day came when Pradeep's wife and son gave their hearts to Jesus and were baptized. Pradeep also wanted to join the Adventist Church, but he had a sinful habit that he seemed powerless to break: tobacco.

Around the time of the baptisms, a new health ministries director was settling into her job at the headquarters of the Gulf Field of the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission. As Kathy Coleman examined her new office, she realized that she was lacking the health ministries' official stamp, which was vital for documents. A call to the former health ministries director yielded both the stamp and several boxes of materials that she had known nothing about. The boxes contained various Adventist health programs, including Breathe Free, a smoking cessation program.

While sorting out the materials, Kathy received a call from pastor Muyi.

"Could you arrange a stop-smoking program for Pradeep?" he asked.

Kathy realized that God had provided everything that she needed to help the man. God had put all the pieces together just in time for the pastor's phone call. Kathy got in touch with Pradeep and helped him through the nine-week program. He stopped smoking and, two months after completing the program, remained smoke-free and without cravings. With joy, he was baptized on Sabbath, March 13, 2021. "The Lord has been blessing me both physically and spiritually in my life," he said. "He has improved my health, my family is happier, and even at work I am performing better."

Now the 47-year-old man is telling everyone about Jesus and inviting them to experience his joy. Through his testimony about how he quit smoking, three new families have sent their children to the Pathfinder club.

"Jesus is inviting every one of His followers to shine brightly for Him," said Marc Coleman, president of the Gulf Field. "The Lord is calling all of us to live a transformed life that will let others know of the love of Jesus in us," he said.

This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . across the 10/40 Window." Read more: IWillGo2020.org.



Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

The Roots of Abraham



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 12; Isa. 48:20; Isa. 36:6, 9; Jer. 2:18; Genesis 13; Genesis 14; Heb. 7:1–10.*

Memory Text: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (*Hebrews 11:8, NKJV*).

We have now reached the center of the book of Genesis. This central section (*Genesis 12–22*) will cover the journey of Abraham, from God's first call, *lekh lekha*, “Go!” (*Gen. 12:1*), which leads Abraham to leave his past, to God's second call, *lekh lekha*, “Go!” (*Gen. 22:2*), which leads Abraham to leave his future (as it would exist in his son). As a result, Abraham always is on the move, always a migrant, which is why he also is called a “stranger” (*Gen. 17:8*).

In his journeying, Abraham is suspended in the void—without his past, which he has lost, and without his future, which he does not see. Between these two calls, which frame Abraham's journey of faith, Abraham hears God's voice, which reassures him: “Do not be afraid” (*Gen. 15:1, NKJV*). These words of God mark the three sections of Abraham's journey, which will be studied in weeks 6, 7, and 8.

Abraham exemplifies faith (*Gen. 15:6*) and is remembered in the Hebrew Scriptures as the man of faith (*Neh. 9:7, 8*). In the New Testament, Abraham is one of the most mentioned figures from the Old Testament, and this week we will start to see why.

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

Abram's Departure

Read Genesis 12:1–9. Why did God call Abram to leave his country and family? How did Abram respond?

The last time that God had spoken with a person, at least as recorded in Scripture, it was with Noah, to reassure him after the Flood that He would establish a covenant with all flesh (*Gen. 9:15–17*) and that another worldwide flood would never come. God's new word, now to Abram, reconnects with that promise: all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abram.

The fulfillment of that prophecy begins with leaving the past. Abram leaves all that is familiar to him, his family, his country, even a part of himself. The intensity of this going is reflected in the repetition of the keyword “go,” which occurs seven times in this context. Abram has first to leave his country, “Ur of the Chaldeans,” which also is Babylonia (*Gen. 11:31, NKJV; Isa. 13:19*). The call to “go out of Babylon” has a long history among the biblical prophets (*Isa. 48:20, Rev. 18:4*).

Abram's departure also concerns his family. Abram must leave his heritage and much of what he learned and acquired through heredity, education, and influence.

Yet, God's call to go involves even more. The Hebrew phrase *lekh lekha*, “go,” translated literally, means “go yourself” or “go for yourself.” Abram's departure from Babylon concerns more than his environment, or even his family. The Hebrew phrase suggests an emphasis on *himself*. Abram has to leave *himself*, to get rid of the part of himself that contains his Babylonian past.

The goal of this abandonment is “a land” that God will show him. The same language will be used again in the context of the sacrifice of Isaac (*Gen. 22:2*) to refer to the mount of Moriah, where Isaac will be offered and where the Jerusalem temple will be built (*2 Chron. 3:1*). God's promise is not just about a physical homeland but about the salvation of the world. This idea is reaffirmed in God's promise of the blessing for all nations (*Gen. 12:2, 3*). The verb *barakh*, “bless,” appears five times in this passage. This universal blessing for all people will come through the “seed” of Abram (*Gen. 22:18, Gen. 26:4, Gen. 28:14*). The text refers here to the “seed” that will ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ (*Acts 3:25*).

What might God be calling you to leave behind? That is, what part of your life might you have to abandon in order to heed the call of God?

The Temptation of Egypt

Read Genesis 12:10–20. Why did Abram leave the Promised Land to go to Egypt? How did the pharaoh behave in comparison to Abram?

Ironically, Abram, who has just arrived in the Promised Land, decides to leave it for Egypt because “there was a famine in the land” (*Gen. 12:10, NKJV*). Evidence of people from Canaan going into Egypt in times of famine is well attested in ancient Egyptian texts. In the Egyptian teaching of Merikare, a text composed during the period of the Middle Kingdom (2060–1700 b.c.), people coming from Canaan are identified as “miserable Asiatic” (*aamu*) and described as “wretched . . . short of water . . . he does not dwell on one place, food propels his legs.”—Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 103, 104.

The temptation of Egypt was often a problem for the ancient Israelites (*Num. 14:3, Jer. 2:18*). Egypt, thus, became a symbol of humans trusting in humans rather than in God (*2 Kings 18:21; Isa. 36:6, 9*). In Egypt, where water could be seen on a daily basis, faith was not necessary, for the promise of the land was immediately visible. Compared to the land of famine, Egypt sounded like a good place to be, despite what God had said to Abram.

The Abram who now leaves Canaan contrasts with the Abram who left Ur. Before, Abram was portrayed as a man of faith who left Ur in response to God’s call; now, Abram leaves the Promised Land by himself, of his own volition. Before, Abram relied on God; now he behaves like a manipulative and unethical politician who counts only on himself. “During his stay in Egypt, Abraham gave evidence that he was not free from human weakness and imperfection. In concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, he betrayed a distrust of the divine care, a lack of that lofty faith and courage so often and nobly exemplified in his life.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 130.

What we see here, then, is how even a great man of God can make a mistake and yet not be forsaken by God. When the New Testament talks about Abraham as an example of salvation by grace, it means just that—grace. Because, if it weren’t by grace, Abraham, like all of us, would have had no hope.

What should this story teach us about how easy it is, even for faithful Christians, to stray from the correct path? Why is disobedience never a good choice?

Abram and Lot

Read Genesis 13:1–18. What does this story teach us about the importance of character?

Abram returns to where he was before, as if his trip to Egypt were a mere unfortunate detour. God’s history with Abram starts again, where it had stopped since his first trip to the Promised Land. Abram’s first station is Bethel (*Gen. 13:3*), just as in his first trip to the land (*Gen. 12:3–6*). Abram has repented and is back to “himself”: Abram, the man of faith.

Abram’s reconnection with God already shows in his relationship with people, in the way that he handles the problem with Lot, his nephew, concerning the use of the land. It is Abram himself who proposes a peaceful agreement and allows Lot to choose first (*Gen. 13:9, 10*), an act of generosity and kindness indicative of the kind of man Abram was.

The fact that Lot chose the easiest and best part for himself—the well-watered plain (*Gen. 13:10, 11*)—without any concern about the wickedness of his future neighbors (*Gen. 13:13*) reveals something about his greediness and character. The phrase “for himself” reminds us of the antediluvians, who also chose “for themselves” (*see Gen. 6:2*).

In contrast, Abram’s move was an act of faith. Abram did not choose the land; it was given to him by God’s grace. Unlike Lot, Abram looked at the land only at God’s injunction (*Gen. 13:14*). It is only when Abram separates from Lot that God speaks to him again (*Gen. 13:14*). In fact, this is the first recorded time in the Bible that God speaks to Abram since his call at Ur. “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever” (*Gen. 13:14, 15, NKJV*). God, then, invites Abram to “walk” on this land as an act of appropriation. “Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you” (*Gen. 13:17, NKJV*).

The Lord, though, makes it very clear that He, God, is giving it to Abram. It is a gift, a gift of grace, which Abram must appropriate by faith, a faith that leads to obedience. It is the work of God alone that will bring about all that He has promised to Abram here (*see Gen. 13:14–17*).

How can we learn to be kind and generous to others, even when they aren’t that way to us?

The Babel Coalition

Read Genesis 14:1–17. What is significant about this war taking place just after the gift of the Promised Land? What does this story teach us about Abram?

This is the first war narrated in the Scriptures (*Gen. 14:2*). The coalition of four armies from Mesopotamia and Persia against the other coalition of five Canaanite armies, including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Gen. 14:8*), suggest a large conflict (*Gen. 14:9*). The reason for this military operation has to do with the fact that the Canaanite peoples had rebelled against their Babylonian suzerains (*Gen. 14:4, 5*). Although this story refers to a specific historical conflict, the timing of this “global” war, just after God’s gift of the Promised Land to Abram, gives this event a particular spiritual significance.

The involvement of so many peoples from the country of Canaan suggests that the issue at stake in this conflict was sovereignty over the land. Ironically, the camp of Abram, the truly interested party, because he is the only true owner of the land, is the only force that remains outside of the conflict, at least at first.

The reason for Abram’s neutrality is that for Abram, the Promised Land was not acquired through the force of arms or through the wisdom of political strategies. Abram’s kingdom was God’s gift. The only reason Abram will intervene is the fate of his nephew Lot, who was taken prisoner in the course of the battles (*Gen. 14:12, 13*).

“Abraham, dwelling in peace in the oak groves at Mamre, learned from one of the fugitives the story of the battle and the calamity that had befallen his nephew. He had cherished no unkind memory of Lot’s ingratitude. All his affection for him was awakened, and he determined that he should be rescued. Seeking, first of all, divine counsel, Abraham prepared for war.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 135.

But Abram does not confront the whole coalition. In what must have been a quick and nocturnal commando operation, he attacks only the camp where Lot was held prisoner. Lot is saved. Thus, this faithful man of God also showed great courage and fortitude. No doubt his influence in the region grew, and people saw the kind of man he was and learned something more of the God whom he served.

What kind of influence do our actions have on others? What kind of message are we sending about our faith by our actions?

The Tithe of Melchizedek

Read Genesis 14:18–24 and Hebrews 7:1–10. Who was Melchizedek? Why did Abram give his tithe to this priest who seems to appear out of nowhere?

The sudden appearance of the mysterious Melchizedek is not out of place. After Abram has been thanked by the Canaanite kings, he now thanks this priest, a thankfulness revealed by his paying his tithe to him.

Melchizedek comes from the city of Salem, which means “peace,” an appropriate message after the turmoil of war.

The component *tsedek*, “justice,” in the name of Melchizedek, appears in contrast to the name of the king of Sodom, *Bera* (“in evil”), and Gomorrah, *Birsha* (“in wickedness”), probably surnames for what they represent (*Gen. 14:2*).

Melchizedek appears after the reversal of the violence and evil represented by the other Canaanite kings. This passage also contains the first biblical reference to the word “priest” (*Gen. 14:18*). The association of Melchizedek with “God Most High” (*Gen. 14:18, NKJV*), whom Abram calls his own God (*Gen. 14:22*), clearly indicates that Abram saw him as priest of the God Abram served. Melchizedek is, however, not to be identified with Christ. He was God’s representative among the people of that time (see Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 1092, 1093).

Melchizedek officiates, indeed, as a priest. He serves “bread and wine,” an association that often implies the use of fresh-pressed grape juice (*Deut. 7:13, 2 Chron. 31:5*), which reappears in the context of the giving of the tithes (*Deut. 14:23*). In addition, he extends blessing to Abram (*Gen. 14:19*).

Abram, meanwhile, “gave him a tithe of all” (*Gen. 14:20, NKJV*) as a response to God the Creator, the “Possessor of heaven and earth” (*Gen. 14:19, NKJV*). This title alludes to the introduction of the Creation story (*Gen. 1:1, NKJV*), where the phrase “heavens and earth” means totality or “all.” As such, the tithe is understood as an expression of gratitude to the Creator, who owns everything (*Heb. 7:2–6; compare with Gen. 28:22*). Paradoxically, the tithe is understood by the worshiper not as a gift *to* God, but as a gift *from* God, because God gives us everything to begin with.

Why is the act of returning tithe a powerful indicator of faith, as well as a great faith-building act?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Abraham in Canaan,” pp. 134–136, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Christ’s church is to be a blessing, and its members are to be blessed as they bless others. The object of God in choosing a people before all the world was not only that He might adopt them as His sons and daughters, but that through them He might confer on the world the benefits of divine illumination. When the Lord chose Abraham it was not simply to be the special friend of God, but to be a medium of the precious and peculiar privileges the Lord desired to bestow upon the nations. He was to be a light amid the moral darkness of his surroundings.

“Whenever God blesses His children with light and truth, it is not only that they may have the gift of eternal life, but that those around them may also be spiritually enlightened. . . . ‘Ye are the salt of the earth.’ And when God makes His children salt, it is not only for their own preservation, but that they may be agents in preserving others. . . .

“Do you shine as living stones in God’s building? . . . We have not the genuine religion, unless it exerts a controlling influence upon us in every business transaction. We should have practical godliness to weave into our lifework. We should have the transforming grace of Christ upon our hearts. We need a great deal less of self, and more of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 205.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In light of the blessing of Abram, “I will bless you . . . and you shall be a blessing’ ” (*Gen. 12:2, NKJV*), what does it mean to be blessed? How can we, as people who serve the same God as did Abram, be a blessing to others?
- 2 What was wrong in Abram’s half lie regarding his sister-wife? What is worse: lying or saying some truth while still, at the same time, technically lying?
- 3 Read again Genesis 14:21–23, Abram’s response to the offer of the king of Sodom. Why did he respond as he did, and what important lesson can we take from this story? Would not Abram have been justified had he decided to take what the king had offered him?

A Dream Marriage

By YULIA BONDARENKO

The day Ruth took her first step toward becoming a missionary was when she gave her life to Jesus and was baptized while in the seventh grade in the United States.

In the eighth grade, she was asked to clean her Seventh-day Adventist church. She knew nothing about cleaning churches, so instead she sat at the piano. As she played and sang about her Savior, she imagined people from various countries sitting in the pews, and a prayerful desire formed in her mind to marry a man who would play and sing with her. But who?

When she was 15, Ruth watched her newly married sister, visiting home from her honeymoon, slip into her wedding gown, put her hands over her eyes, and sob. Ruth resolved that a similar situation would not happen to her and started to make a list of desirable traits in her future husband. Her mother, learning about the list, wisely said, "Ruth, you also have to become the kind of woman whom that man might want." Ruth prayerfully began to seek to acquire these traits that she expected in her husband. But who?

Just before attending Andrews University, Ruth briefly was engaged, but she broke it off. A few months later, she ended another relationship after learning that the man was dating someone else at the same time.

That winter, Ruth was in the women's residence hall, waiting to go caroling, when a friend exclaimed, "There's Emil Moldrik! Let's get into his car!" "Who?" Ruth asked. "Don't you know?" her friend replied. "He sings, plays the organ, and wants to be a pastor." Ruth thought, *That's who!*

For the next few hours, Ruth sang soprano and Emil sang tenor. She felt a new joy in her heart and couldn't stop looking at his eyes. She believed that eyes are the windows to the heart, and his eyes were so kind and pure. Emil returned Ruth's gaze as they sang, and the next evening he called for a date.

Today, Emil and Ruth Moldrik have been married nearly 60 years and have served God in more than 15 countries, singing and playing musical instruments as missionaries. Emil plays 12 instruments, including the saw and autoharp. The couple has visited Ukraine alone 10 times, conducting marriage and English-language classes and Bible meetings.

As Ruth remembers the day she sang and played in the empty church, she praises God for fulfilling her dream. "I did sing and play around the world, so God answered my prayers," she says.

This mission story illustrates Spiritual Mission Objective No. 7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To help youth and young adults place God first and exemplify a biblical worldview." Learn more: IWillGo2020.org.



Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.



TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT TIME

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. THEN GO OUT AND REACH SOMEONE!

*Adjust times as necessary.

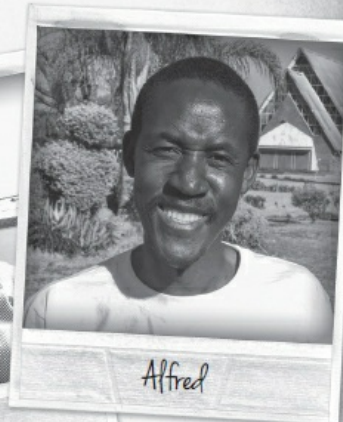
UNITED BY MISSION



Alexandra



Derhain



Alfred

A girl becomes an Adventurer through friendship evangelism in Angola. A young man prays to God in an abusive home in Namibia. An aspiring ministerial student miraculously survives a horrific car accident in Zimbabwe. What do they have in common? They are united by love for Christ and His mission in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, which will receive this quarter's Thirteen Sabbath Offering.

Read more in the youth and adult Mission magazine (bit.ly/adultmission) and the Children's Mission magazine (bit.ly/childrensmisson).

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

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The Covenant *With* Abraham



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 15–19:29; Rom. 4:3, 4, 9, 22; Gal. 4:21–31; Rom 4:11; Rom. 9:9; Amos 4:11.*

Memory Text: “But Abram said, ‘Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’” (*Genesis 15:2, NKJV*).

With Genesis 15, we come to the crucial moment when God formalizes His covenant with Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant is the second covenant, after the covenant with Noah.

Like Noah's covenant, Abraham's covenant involves other nations, as well, for ultimately, the covenant with Abraham is part of the everlasting covenant, which is offered to all humanity (*Gen. 17:7, Heb. 13:20*).

This episode of Abraham's life is full of fear and laughter. Abram is afraid (*Gen. 15:1*), as are Sarah (*Gen. 18:15*) and Hagar (*Gen. 21:17*). Abram laughs (*Gen. 17:17*), and Sarah (*Gen. 18:12*), and Ishmael, too (*Gen. 21:9, ESV*). These chapters resonate with human sensitivity and warmth. Abram is passionate about the salvation of the wicked Sodomites; he is caring toward Sarah, Hagar, and Lot; and he is hospitable toward the three foreigners (*Gen. 18:2–6*).

It is in this context that Abram, whose name implies nobility and respectability, will have his name changed into Abraham, which means “father of many nations” (*Gen. 17:5*). Thus, we see here more hints of the universal nature of what God plans to do through His covenant with Abraham.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 14.

The Faith of Abraham

Read Genesis 15:1–21 and Romans 4:3, 4, 9, 22. How does Abram reveal what it means to live by faith? What is the meaning of the sacrifice that God had Abram perform?

God's first response to Abram's concern about an heir (*Gen. 15:1–3*) is that he will have a son from his "own body" (*Gen. 15:4, NKJV*). The same language is used by the prophet Nathan to refer to the seed of the future Messianic King (*2 Sam. 7:12*). Abram was reassured and "believed in the LORD" (*Gen. 15:6*), because he understood that the fulfillment of God's promise depended not on his own righteousness but on God's (*Gen. 15:6; compare with Rom. 4:5, 6*).

This notion is extraordinary, especially in that culture. In the religion of the ancient Egyptians, for instance, judgment was made on the basis of counting one's human works of righteousness against the righteousness of the goddess Maat, who represented divine righteousness. In short, you had to earn "salvation."

God then sets up a sacrificial ceremony for Abram to perform. Basically, the sacrifice points to Christ's death for our sins. Humans are saved by grace, the gift of God's righteousness, symbolized by these sacrifices. But this particular ceremony conveys specific messages for Abram. The preying of the vultures on the sacrificial animals (*Gen. 15:9–11*) means that Abram's descendants will suffer slavery for a period of " 'four hundred years' " (*Gen. 15:13*), or four generations (*Gen. 15:16*). Then in the fourth generation, Abram's descendants " 'shall return here' " (*Gen. 15:16, NKJV*).

The last scene of the sacrificial ceremony is dramatic: "a burning torch that passed between those pieces" (*Gen. 15:17, NKJV*). This extraordinary wonder signifies God's commitment to fulfill His covenant promise of giving land to Abram's descendants (*Gen. 15:18*).

The boundaries of this Promised Land, " 'from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates' " (*Gen. 15:18, NKJV*) remind us of the boundaries of the Garden of Eden (*compare with Gen. 2:13, 14*). This prophecy has, therefore, more in view than just the Exodus and a homeland for Israel. On the distant horizon of this prophecy, in Abraham's descendants taking the country of Canaan, looms the idea of the end-time salvation of God's people, who will return to the Garden of Eden.

How can we learn to keep focused on Christ and His righteousness as our only hope of salvation? What happens if we try to start counting up our good works?

Abraham's Doubts

Read Genesis 16:1–16. What is the significance of Abram's decision to go with Hagar, even despite God's promise to him? How do the two women represent two attitudes of faith (*Gal. 4:21–31*)?

When Abram doubted (*Gen. 15:2*), God unambiguously reassured him that he would have a son. Years later, Abram is still without a son. Even after God's last powerful prophecy, Abram seems to have lost his faith: he does not believe anymore that it will be possible for him to have a son with Sarai. Sarai, feeling hopeless, takes the initiative and urges him to resort to a common practice of that time in the ancient Near East: take a surrogate. Hagar, Sarai's servant, is appointed for this service. The system works. Ironically, this human strategy seemed more efficient than did faith in God's promises.

The passage describing Sarai's relation to Abram echoes the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The two texts share a number of common motifs (Sarai, like Eve, is active; Abram, like Adam, is passive) and share common verbs and phrases ("heed the voice," "take," and "give"). This parallel between the two stories implies God's disapproval of this course of action.

The apostle Paul refers to this story to make his point about works versus grace (*Gal. 4:23–26*). In both accounts, the result is the same: the immediate reward of human work outside the will of God leads to future troubles. Note that God is absent during the whole course of action. Sarai speaks about God but never speaks to Him; nor does God speak to either of them. This absence of God is striking, especially after the intense presence of God in the previous chapter.

God then appears to Hagar but only after she has left the house of Abram. This unexpected appearance discloses God's presence in spite of human attempts to work without Him. The reference to "the Angel of the LORD" (*Gen. 16:7, NKJV*) is a title that is often identified with the LORD, *YHWH* (*see Gen. 18:1, 13, 22*). This time it is God who takes the initiative and announces to Hagar that she will give birth to a son, Ishmael, whose name means God hears (*Gen. 16:11*). Ironically, the story, which ends with the idea of hearing (*shama'*), echoes the hearing at the beginning of the story, when Abram "heeded" (*shama'*) the voice of Sarai (*Gen. 16:2*).

Why is it so easy for us to have the same lack of faith that Abram had here?

The Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant

Read Genesis 17:1–19 and Romans 4:11. What is the spiritual and prophetic significance of the circumcision rite?

Abram's lack of faith, as seen in the preceding story (*Genesis 16*), broke the flow of Abram's spiritual journey with God. During that time God was silent. But now, God speaks again to Abram. God reconnects with Abram and brings him back to the point when He made a covenant with Abram (*Gen. 15:18*).

Now, though, God gives him the sign of that covenant. The meaning of circumcision has been long discussed by scholars, but because the rite of circumcision involves the shedding of blood (*see Exod. 4:25*), it could be understood in the context of sacrifice, signifying that righteousness was imputed to him (*compare with Rom. 4:11*).

It also is significant that this covenant, signified by circumcision, is described in terms that point back to the first Messianic prophecy (*compare Gen. 17:7 with Gen. 3:15*). The parallel between the two texts suggests that God's promise to Abram concerns more than just the physical birth of a people; it contains the spiritual promise of salvation for all the peoples of the earth. And the promise of the "everlasting covenant" (*Gen. 17:7*) refers to the work of the Messianic Seed, the sacrifice of Christ that ensures eternal life to all who claim it by faith and all that faith entails (*compare with Rom. 6:23 and Titus 1:2*).

Interestingly, this promise of an eternal future is contained in the change of the names of Abram and Sarai. The names of Abram and Sarai referred just to their present status: Abram means "exalted father" and Sarai means "my princess" (the princess of Abram). The change of their names into "Abraham" and "Sarah" referred to the future: Abraham means "father of many nations" and Sarah means "the princess" (for everyone). In parallel, but not without some irony, the name of Isaac ("he will laugh") is a reminder of Abraham's laughter (the first laughter recorded in the Scriptures, *Gen. 17:17*); it is a laughter of skepticism or, maybe, of wonder. Either way, though he believed in what the Lord had clearly promised him, Abraham still struggled with living it out in faith and trust.

How can we learn to keep on believing even when, at times, we struggle with that belief, as did Abraham? Why is it important that we not give up, despite times of doubt?

The Son of Promise

The last scene of circumcision involved everyone: not only Ishmael—but also all the males of Abraham’s household were circumcised (*Gen. 17:23–27*). The word *kol*, “all,” “every,” is repeated four times (*Gen. 17:23, 27*). It is against this inclusive background that God appears to Abraham to confirm the promise of a son, “Isaac.”

Read Genesis 18:1–15 and Romans 9:9. What lessons of hospitality do we learn from Abraham’s reception of his visitors? How do you explain God’s response to Abraham’s hospitality?

It is not clear whether Abraham knew who these strangers were (*Heb. 13:2*), even though he acted toward them as if God Himself were among them. He was sitting “in the tent door in the heat of the day” (*Gen. 18:1, NKJV*), and because visitors are rare in the desert, he was probably longing to meet with them. Abraham ran toward the men (*Gen. 18:2*), although he was 99 years old. He called one of these persons Adonai, “my Lord” (*Gen. 18:3*), a title often used for God (*Gen. 20:4, Exod. 15:17*). He rushed around them in the preparation of the meal (*Gen. 18:6, 7*). He stood next to them, attentive to their needs and ready to serve them (*Gen. 18:8*).

Abraham’s behavior toward heavenly strangers will become an inspiring model of hospitality (*Heb. 13:2*). In fact, Abraham’s attitude of reverence conveys a philosophy of hospitality. Showing respect and care toward strangers is not just a nice gesture of courtesy. The Bible emphasizes that it is a religious duty, as if directed toward God Himself (*compare with Matt. 25:35–40*). Ironically, God is identified more with the hungry and needy foreigner than with the generous one who receives them.

On the other hand, the divine intrusion into the human sphere denotes His grace and love toward humanity. This appearance of God anticipates Christ, who left His heavenly home and became a human servant to reach humankind (*Phil. 2:7, 8*). God’s appearance here provides evidence for the certainty of His promise (*Gen. 18:10, NKJV*). He sees Sarah, who hides herself “behind him” (*Gen. 18:10*), and knows her most intimate thoughts (*Gen. 18:12*). He knows that she laughed, and the word “laugh” is His last word. Her skepticism becomes the place where He will fulfill His word.

Dwell more on the idea that “God is identified more with the hungry and needy foreigner than with the generous one who receives them.” Why is this concept so important for us to remember?

Lot in Sodom

Read Genesis 18:16–19:29. How does Abraham’s prophetic ministry affect his responsibility toward Lot?

God’s promise of a son to Abraham has just been reconfirmed. Yet, instead of enjoying the good news, he engages God in a passionate discussion about the fate of Lot in Sodom. Abraham not only is a prophet to whom God reveals His will; but he also is a prophet who intercedes on behalf of the wicked. The Hebrew phrase “stood before the LORD” (*Gen. 18:22, NKJV*) is an idiom for praying.

In fact, Abraham challenges God and bargains with Him to save Sodom, where his nephew resides. Moving from 50 down to 10, God would have saved the people of Sodom if only 10 Sodomites had been righteous.

Of course, when we read the story of what happened when the two angels came to Lot to warn him of what was coming (*Gen. 19:1–10*), we can see just how sick and evil the people had become. It truly was a wicked place, as were many of the nations around them; one reason why, eventually, they were driven from the land (*see Gen. 15:16*).

“And now the last night of Sodom was approaching. Already the clouds of vengeance cast their shadows over the devoted city. But men perceived it not. While angels drew near on their mission of destruction, men were dreaming of prosperity and pleasure. The last day was like every other that had come and gone. Evening fell upon a scene of loveliness and security. A landscape of unrivaled beauty was bathed in the rays of the declining sun. The coolness of eventide had called forth the inhabitants of the city, and the pleasure-seeking throngs were passing to and fro, intent upon the enjoyment of the hour.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 157, 158.

In the end, God saved only Lot, his wife, and his two daughters (*Gen. 19:15*), almost half the minimum of 10. The sons-in-law, who did not take Lot’s warning seriously, remained in the city (*Gen. 19:14*).

That beautiful country was, then, destroyed. The Hebrew verb *hafakh*, “overthrew,” occurs several times in this passage (*Gen. 19:21, 25, 29*) and characterizes the destruction of Sodom (*Deut. 29:23, Amos 4:11*). The idea is that the country has been “reversed.” Just as the Flood “reversed” the original creation (*Gen. 6:7*), the destruction of Sodom is a “reversal” of the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 13:10*). In the destruction of Sodom, we are given a precursor of end-time destruction, as well (*see Jude 7*).

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law and the Covenants,” pp. 370–373, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Abraham’s patient and tenacious plea with God on behalf of the people of Sodom (*Gen. 18:22–33*) should encourage us to pray for the wicked, even though they appear to be in a hopeless condition of sin. Furthermore, God’s attentive response to Abraham’s insistence, and His willingness to forgive for the sake of only “ten” righteous men is a “revolutionary” concept, as pointed out by Gerhard Hasel:

“In an extremely revolutionary manner the old collective thinking, which brought the guiltless member of the guilty association under punishment, has been transposed into something new: the presence of a remnant of righteous people could have a preserving function for the whole. . . . For the sake of the righteous remnant Yahweh would in his righteousness [*tsedaqah*] forgive the wicked city. This notion is widely expanded in the prophetic utterance of the Servant of Yahweh who works salvation ‘for many.’ ”—Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea From Genesis to Isaiah*, 3rd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980), pp. 150, 151.

“All around us are souls going down to ruin as hopeless, as terrible, as that which befell Sodom. Every day the probation of some is closing. Every hour some are passing beyond the reach of mercy. And where are the voices of warning and entreaty to bid the sinner flee from this fearful doom? Where are the hands stretched out to draw him back from death? Where are those who with humility and persevering faith are pleading with God for him? The spirit of Abraham was the spirit of Christ. The Son of God is Himself the great Intercessor in the sinner’s behalf. He who has paid the price for its redemption knows the worth of the human soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 140.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Only the rainbow and circumcision are called “sign of the covenant.” What are the common points and the differences between the two covenants?
- 2 Though called of God, and though often used in the New Testament as the example of what it means to live by faith, Abraham at times faltered. What lessons should we learn and not learn from his example?
- 3 Some people argue against the idea that God will punish the lost, saying that this act would be against God’s love. How do we, as those who believe that—yes, God will punish the lost—respond to the argument that He doesn’t?

A Teacher's Prayer

By Andrew McChesney

A school friend told Selinah that she should worship Jesus. "You need to go to church because Jesus is coming, and when He comes, He will take His own," she said. The friend also said only two churches exist in the world—the Seventh-day Adventist Church and another church. Selinah, whose parents were not particularly religious, chose the other church because it had the larger building in her village in northern Botswana.

After some time, a relative, a boy around her age, invited Selinah to the Adventist church. Selinah's friends at the other church cautioned her against going. "Don't go to that church," said one. "You won't come back to your own church," said another. "Why would I leave my church?" Selinah asked.

On Sabbath morning, Selinah walked with the boy to church. The worship service had begun when they arrived. It was so different to Selinah. The preacher talked to God like he was talking to a friend. The handshakes after the worship service surprised her. It was as if the church members had been expecting her. Learning that the preacher would conduct a series of sermons, she came back for what turned out to be an evangelistic series. She listened with amazement as the preacher used slides to show that the beasts of Daniel 7 represented world kingdoms up through Jesus' second coming. After the meetings ended, she never returned to her former church. She was baptized and joined the Adventist Church.

Selinah Oreneile Nkwae grew up and became a schoolteacher. More than anything she wanted to teach children about Jesus at an Adventist school. But there was no Adventist school, so she taught at government schools for 34 years. After retiring, she prayed earnestly about how to be a good witness for God, and she led several evangelistic efforts that resulted in a number of baptisms. But she couldn't forget her desire to teach at an Adventist school.

One day, her husband saw a newspaper advertisement seeking teachers for a new Adventist school in Francistown. Selinah applied and was accepted at Eastern Gate Primary School, which was constructed with a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2015. God had answered her prayers. "The daily prayer of all the teachers is for the kids to see God's character in us," Selinah said.

This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: Mission Objective No. 4, "To strengthen Seventh-day Adventist institutions in upholding freedom, wholistic health, and hope through Jesus, and restoring in people the image of God," and Spiritual Growth Objective No. 6, "To increase accession, retention, reclamation, and participation of children, youth, and young adults." Read more: IWillGo2020.org.



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The Promise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 22, Heb. 11:17, Lev. 18:21, John 1:1–3, Rom. 5:6–8, Genesis 23–25, Rom. 4:1–12.*

Memory Text: “Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things” (*Genesis 24:1, NKJV*).

Finally, as God had promised, Sarah bore Abraham a son, “in his old age” (*Gen. 21:2*), and he named the baby Isaac (*see Gen. 21:1–5*). But the story of Abraham is far from over, reaching a climactic moment when he took his son to Mount Moriah to be sacrificed. Isaac, however, is replaced by a ram (*Gen. 22:13*), which signified God’s commitment to bless the nations through his “seed” (*Gen. 22:17, 18*). That Seed, of course, was Jesus (*Acts 13:23*). Hence, in this astonishing (and in some ways troubling) story, more of the plan of salvation is revealed.

Whatever the deep spiritual lessons here, the family of Abraham, nevertheless, must have been shaken by it, and the future of Abraham is not clear. Sarah dies after the sacrifice at Moriah (*Genesis 23*), and Isaac remains single.

Abraham then takes the initiative to make sure that the “right” future will follow him. He arranges the marriage of his son to Rebekah (*Genesis 24*), who will give birth to two sons (*Gen. 25:21–23*), and Abraham himself marries Keturah, who will give him many children (*Gen. 25:1–6*). This week, we will follow Abraham to the end of his life (*Gen. 25:7–11*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 21.

Mount Moriah

Read Genesis 22:1–12 and Hebrews 11:17. What was the meaning of this test? What spiritual lessons come from this amazing event?

Genesis 22 has become a classic in world literature and has inspired philosophers and artists, not just theologians. The meaning of God’s test is difficult to comprehend, however. This divine command contradicted the later biblical prohibition against human sacrifices (*Lev. 18:21*), and it surely seemed to work against God’s promise of an eternal covenant through Isaac (*Gen. 15:5*).

What, then, was the purpose of God’s calling him to do this? Why test him in such a powerful way?

The biblical notion of “test” (in Hebrew, *nissah*) embraces two opposite ideas. It refers to the idea of judgment; that is, a judgment in order to know what is in the heart of the tested one (*Deut. 8:2; compare with Gen. 22:12*). But it also brings the assurance of God’s grace on behalf of the tested (*Exod. 20:18–20*).

In this case, Abraham’s faith in God takes him to the point that he runs the risk of losing his “future” (his posterity). And yet, because he trusts God, he will do what God asks, no matter how difficult it all is to understand. After all, what is faith if not trust in what we don’t see or fully understand?

Also, biblical faith is not so much about our capacity to give to God and to sacrifice for Him—though that has a role, no doubt (*Rom. 12:1*)—but about our capacity to trust Him and to receive His grace while understanding just how undeserving we are.

This truth was reaffirmed in what followed. All the works of Abraham, his many zealous activities, his painful journey with his son, even his readiness to obey and offer to God the best of himself, however instructive, could not save him. Why? Because the Lord Himself had provided a ram for the intended sacrifice, which itself pointed to his only hope of salvation, Jesus.

Abraham must have, then, understood grace. It is not our works for God that save us, but it is instead God’s work for us (*Eph. 3:8; compare with Rom. 11:33*), however much, like Abraham, we are called to work for God, which Abraham’s actions powerfully reveal (*James 2:2–23*).

What does the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah say to you personally about your faith and how you manifest it?

God Will Provide

Read Genesis 22:8, 14, 18. How did God fulfill His promise that He would provide? What was provided?

When Isaac asked about the sacrificial animal, Abraham gave an intriguing answer: God will “ ‘provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering’ ” (*Gen. 22:8, NKJV*). Yet, the Hebrew verbal form can actually mean “God will provide Himself as the lamb.” The verb “provide” (*yir’eh lo*) is used in a way that can mean “provide Himself” (or literally, “see Himself”).

What we are being shown here, then, is the essence of the plan of salvation, with the Lord Himself suffering and paying in Himself the penalty for our sins!

Read John 1:1–3 and Romans 5:6–8. How do these verses help us understand what happened at the Cross, which is prefigured in the sacrifice here on Mount Moriah?

There, at Mount Moriah, long before the Cross, the sacrificial ram “caught in a thicket by his horns” (*Gen. 22:13*) was pointing right to Jesus. He is One that is “seen” here, as Abraham explains later, “In the mount where the LORD is seen” (*Gen. 22:14, author’s translation*). Jesus Himself had pointed to Abraham’s prophetic utterance here, when He said, echoing Abraham’s statement: “ ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad’ ” (*John 8:56, NKJV*).

“It was to impress Abraham’s mind with the reality of the gospel, as well as to test his faith, that God commanded him to slay his son. The agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man’s redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

How does what happened here help us better understand what happened at the Cross and what God has suffered in our behalf? What should our response be to what has been done for us?

The Death of Sarah

In Genesis 22:23, we see the report of the birth of Rebekah, which anticipates the future marriage between Isaac and Rebekah (*Genesis 24*). Likewise, the report of the death and burial of Abraham's wife, Sarah (*Genesis 23*), anticipates his future marriage with Keturah (*Gen. 25:1-4*).

Read Genesis 23. What function does the story of Sarah's death and burial play in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham?

The mention of the death of Sarah after the story of the sacrifice of Isaac suggests that she might have been affected by this incident, which almost cost her son's life. In some way, Sarah also was involved in the "test" with her husband, just as she was in his travels and his occasional lapses in faith (*Gen. 12:11-13*).

Though we don't know how much Sarah knew about the incident after it occurred, we can infer that she probably learned of it eventually. Sarah was not the kind of woman who would keep quiet on matters that were of significance or were disturbing her (*compare with Gen. 16:3-5; Gen. 18:15; Gen. 21:9, 10*). Her absence and her silence, and even the timing of her death following that dramatic event, say more about her relevance to the events than did her physical presence. The fact that Sarah's old age is mentioned (*Gen. 23:1*), in echo to Abraham's old age (*Gen. 24:1*), shows her importance to the story.

In fact, Sarah is the only woman in the Old Testament of whom the number of her years is mentioned, which could show her involvement in the story even after the fact. The focus on the purchase of Sarah's burial place (which covers most of the chapter), rather than on her death, emphasizes the connection with the Promised Land.

Already, the specification that she died "in the land of Canaan" (*Gen. 23:2*) underlines the rooting of Sarah's death in God's promise of the land. Sarah is the first of Abraham's clan to have died and been buried in the Promised Land. Abraham's concern about himself, "a foreigner and a visitor" (*Gen. 23:4, NKJV*), and his insistent argument with the sons of Heth, show that Abraham is interested not just in acquiring a burial place; he is primarily concerned with settling in the land permanently.

Read Genesis 23:6. What does this tell us about the kind of reputation Abraham had? Why is this important in understanding what he was used by the Lord to do?

A Wife for Isaac

Genesis 24 tells the story of the marriage of Isaac after Sarah's death. The two stories are related.

Read Genesis 24. Why is Abraham so concerned that his son not marry a woman from the Canaanites?

Just as Abraham wanted to acquire the land in order to bury his wife, because of God's promise to his descendants that they would have this land, he now insists that Isaac not settle outside of the Promised Land either (*Gen. 24:7*). Also, Isaac's move to bring his bride to Sarah's tent and the note that Rebekah comforted Isaac "after his mother's death" (*Gen. 24:67*) point back to Sarah's death, implying Isaac's pain at the loss of his mother.

The story is full of prayers and fulfillment of prayers and rich with lessons about God's providence and human freedom. It begins with Abraham's words. Swearing by "the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth" (*Gen. 24:3, NKJV*), Abraham is first of all acknowledging God as the Creator (*Gen. 1:1, Gen. 14:19*), with a direct bearing on the births of Abraham's descendants, including the Messiah Himself.

The reference to "His angel" and to "the LORD God of heaven" (*Gen. 24:7, NKJV*) points back to the Angel of the Lord, who came from heaven to rescue Isaac from being slaughtered (*Gen. 22:11*). The God who controls the universe, the Angel of the Lord who intervened to save Isaac, will lead in this question of marriage.

Abraham leaves open, however, the possibility that the woman will not respond to God's call. As powerful as He is, God does not force humans to obey Him. Although God's plan for Rebekah is to follow Eliezer, she retains her freedom of choice. That is, it was possible that this woman would not want to come, and if not, she would not be forced to.

Hence, we see here another example of the great mystery of how God has given us, as humans, free will, free choice, a freedom that He will not trample on. (If He did trample, it would not be free will.) And yet, somehow, despite the reality of human free will, and many of the terrible choices humans make with that free will, we can still trust that in the end God's love and goodness, ultimately, will prevail.

Why is it so comforting to know that while not all things are God's will, He is still in charge? How do prophecies like Daniel 2, for instance, prove this point to us?

A Wife for Abraham

Read Genesis 24:67–25:8. What is the meaning of these final events in the life of Abraham?

After Sarah died, Abraham married again. Like Isaac, he is comforted after the death of Sarah (*Gen. 24:67*). The memory of Sarah must still surely be vivid in the mind of the patriarch, as it is for his son.

Yet, the identity of his new wife is unclear. The fact that the chronicler associates Keturah's sons together with Hagar's sons, without mentioning the name of Keturah, suggests, however, that Keturah could (as some have suggested) be Hagar. We just don't know. It also is significant that Abraham behaves with Keturah's sons the same way he did with Hagar's son: he sends them away to avoid any spiritual influence and make a clear distinction between his son with Sarah and the other sons.

He also gives "all that he had unto Isaac" (*Gen. 25:5*) while he "gave gifts to the sons of the concubines" (*Gen. 25:6, NKJV*). The classification of "concubines" may also imply that Keturah's status, like Hagar, was that of a concubine. The potential identification of Keturah as Hagar may also explain the subtle allusion to the memory of Sarah as a prelude to his marriage with Keturah-Hagar.

What's interesting is that in Genesis 25:1–4, 12–18, a list of the children that Abraham had with Keturah, as well as a list of Ishmael's children, is given. The purpose of the genealogy after Abraham's marriage with Keturah, who gave him six sons, versus his two other sons (Isaac and Ishmael), is perhaps to provide immediate evidence of God's promise that Abraham would father many nations.

The second genealogy concerned the descendants of Ishmael, who also composed 12 tribes (*compare with Gen. 17:20*), just as Jacob's would (*Gen. 35:22–26*). Of course, God's covenant will be reserved to the seed of Isaac (*Gen. 17:21*), not Ishmael, a point that Scripture is very clear about.

The report of Abraham's death sandwiched between the two genealogies (*Gen. 25:7–11*) also testifies to God's blessing. It reveals the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, made many years earlier, that he would die "at a good old age" (*Gen. 15:15, NKJV*) and "full of years" (*compare with Eccles. 6:3*).

In the end, the Lord remained true to His promises of grace to His faithful servant Abraham, whose faith is depicted in Scripture as a great example, if not *the best* example, in the Old Testament of salvation by faith (*see Rom. 4:1–12*).

Further Thought: Because Abraham was the extraordinary prophet with whom God would share His plans (*Gen. 18:17*), God entered Abraham's human sphere and shared with him, to some degree, His plan of salvation through the sacrifice of His Son.

"Isaac was a figure of the Son of God, who was offered a sacrifice for the sins of the world. God would impress upon Abraham the gospel of salvation to man. In order to do this, and make the truth a reality to him as well as to test his faith, He required him to slay his darling Isaac. All the sorrow and agony that Abraham endured through that dark and fearful trial were for the purpose of deeply impressing upon his understanding the plan of redemption for fallen man. He was made to understand in his own experience how unutterable was the self-denial of the infinite God in giving His own Son to die to rescue man from utter ruin. To Abraham no mental torture could be equal to that which he endured in obeying the divine command to sacrifice his son."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 369.

"Abraham had become an old man, and expected soon to die; yet one act remained for him to do in securing the fulfillment of the promise to his posterity. Isaac was the one divinely appointed to succeed him as the keeper of the law of God and the father of the chosen people, but he was yet unmarried. The inhabitants of Canaan were given to idolatry, and God had forbidden intermarriage between His people and them, knowing that such marriages would lead to apostasy. The patriarch feared the effect of the corrupting influences surrounding his son. . . . In the mind of Abraham the choice of a wife for his son was a matter of grave importance; he was anxious to have him marry one who would not lead him from God. . . . Isaac, trusting to his father's wisdom and affection, was satisfied to commit the matter to him, believing also that God Himself would direct in the choice made."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 171.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, talk about Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac. Try to imagine the kind of faith that this account reveals. What is so astonishing, and yet at the same time troubling, about this story?
- 2 What about free will? Why does our faith make no sense without it being a reality? What examples do we have in the Bible of free will and how, despite the wrong choices people make, God's will ultimately is accomplished?

Two Divine Appointments

By THEDA PIENAAR

I have a habit of not traveling without first asking God whether the trip would be His will. I live in Ireland, while my family lives in South Africa and a sister lives in Namibia. I visit them about once a year. On the airplane, I read the Bible, Ellen White books, and the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*. I also always take *Steps to Christ* in my bag. The books shorten the trip and lead to interesting contacts. Every time I travel, something interesting happens.

One time, I started talking with the man seated next to me while waiting for our flight at the airport in Dublin, Ireland. It turned out that he worked as a special detective for the Irish police force and traveled home to see his family in Cape Town, South Africa, every two to three months. We chatted about life while waiting for our turn to board the plane. On the plane, a young woman sat beside me and immediately began speaking. "I arrived late at the airport and just made the plane," she said. "I am so stressed!"

"God knew that you needed to catch this plane," I said.

I spoke about how God takes charge of our lives when we allow Him.

Just before takeoff, the flight attendant told the young woman that she had taken the wrong seat. She left, and who should sit beside me but the policeman. "Isn't this interesting!" I said. "I believe God does things for a reason."

"You believe in God?" the man asked.

He asked about my religious background, and I said I am a Seventh-day Adventist. "Isn't that strange," he said. "My wife has been trying to convert me for many years. She is Seventh-day Adventist."

"I am thrilled to meet you," I said. And I was.

We spoke about salvation, and I gave him a copy of *Steps to Christ*. "My wife has been trying to get me to read this," he said. "Now I will read it."

My two encounters were so remarkable. The ice was broken with the police detective before we boarded the plane. I also was able to mention God to the woman who sat in the wrong seat. Ireland is a very secular country, and it is not easy to speak to people about Christianity. But God provided two opportunities before the plane even left the ground.

This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: Mission Objective No. 2, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities [and] among unreached and under-reached people groups"; Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5, "To disciple individuals and families into spirit-filled lives"; and the Holy Spirit Objective, "To be defined as the Holy Spirit leads." Read more: IWillGo2020.org.



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Jacob *the* Supplanter



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 25:21–34, Gen. 28:10–22, Gen. 11:1–9, Gen. 29:1–30, Gen. 30:25–32.*

Memory Text: “And Esau said, ‘Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!’ And he said, ‘Have you not reserved a blessing for me?’” (*Genesis 27:36, NKJV*).

We now pick up on the continued family history of Isaac, the miracle child and early ancestor of the promised Seed. The story doesn't start out particularly well, however. The flawed character of his son Jacob will be manifested in the rivalry between the two brothers over the birthright (*Gen. 25:27–34*) and consequently over the right to obtain the blessing of Isaac (*Genesis 27*).

Because Jacob deceives his father and steals the blessing from his older brother, he will have to flee for his life. In exile, God confronts him at Bethel (*Gen. 28:10–22*). From then on Jacob, the deceiver, will experience some deception himself. Instead of Rachel, whom Jacob loves (*Genesis 29*), Leah, the older daughter, will be given to Jacob, and he will have to work 14 years to earn his wives.

Yet, Jacob also will experience God's blessing, for in exile he will have 11 of his sons, and God will increase his wealth.

Thus, whatever else we can see in this story, we can see how God will fulfill His covenant promises, one way or another, regardless of how often His people fail.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 28.

Jacob and Esau

Read Genesis 25:21–34. Compare the two personalities of Jacob and Esau. What qualities of Jacob predisposed him to be worthy of Isaac’s blessing?

Already, from their mother’s womb we understand that Jacob and Esau are different and will struggle against each other. While Esau is described as a tough hunter running in the field, Jacob is seen as a “mild” person sitting in the tent and meditating. The Hebrew word *tam*, translated “mild” (NKJV), is the same verb applied to Job and to Noah, translated “blameless” for Job (*Job 1:8, NKJV*) and “perfect” for Noah (*Gen. 6:9, NKJV*).

This difference of character becomes more manifest later in their lives (*Gen. 27:1–28:5*). Esau comes home tired and hungry, and finds Jacob cooking lentils. For Esau, the immediate visible and physical enjoyment of food “ ‘this day’ ” (*Gen. 25:31*) is more important than the future blessing associated with his birthright (*compare with Heb. 12:16, 17*).

“The promises made to Abraham and confirmed to his son were held by Isaac and Rebekah as the great object of their desires and hopes. With these promises Esau and Jacob were familiar. They were taught to regard the birthright as a matter of great importance, for it included not only an inheritance of worldly wealth but spiritual pre-eminence. He who received it was to be the priest of his family, and in the line of his posterity the Redeemer of the world would come.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 177.

For Jacob, in contrast to his brother, the future spiritual significance of blessing is what matters. Yet, later, under the instigation of his mother (*see Genesis 27*), Jacob openly and purposely deceives his father, even using the name of “ ‘the LORD your God’ ” (*Gen. 27:20, NKJV*) in perpetrating that deception. He commits this terrible deception, even though it was for something that he knew was good.

The results were tragic, adding whole new layers of dysfunction to an already dysfunctional family.

Jacob wanted something good, something of value, and that was admirable (especially compared to his brother’s attitude). Yet, he used deception and lies to get it. How can we avoid falling into a similar trap of doing bad so that “good” may come?

Jacob's Ladder

As soon as Esau learns that Jacob has received his father's blessing, he understands that he has been deceived and supplanted by his brother (*Gen. 27:36*), and he wants to kill him (*Gen. 27:42*). Rebekah is worried and wants to prevent this crime that would be fatal for both sons (*Gen. 27:45*). So, with the support of Isaac (*Gen. 28:5*), she urges Jacob to flee to her family (*Gen. 27:43*). On his way to exile, Jacob encounters God in a dream at a place that he will call Bethel, "the house of God," and there will make a vow.

Compare Genesis 28:10–22 with Genesis 11:1–9. How is Bethel different from Babel? What lesson can we learn about our relationship with God from Jacob's experience at Bethel versus what happened at Babel?

In this dream, Jacob sees an extraordinary ladder that is connected with God. The same Hebrew verb, *natsav*, is used to refer to the ladder that is "set up" (*Gen. 28:12, NKJV*) and the LORD who "stood" (*Gen. 28:13, NKJV*), as if the ladder and the LORD are the same thing.

The ladder is linked to the attempt at Babel to reach heaven. Like the Tower of Babel, the ladder is to reach the "door of heaven." But while the Tower of Babel represents the human effort to go up and reach God, the ladder of Bethel emphasizes that access to God can be achieved only through God's coming to us, and not through human effort.

As for the "stone" on which Jacob has put his head and had his dream, it becomes the symbol of *beth-El*, "the house of God" (*Gen. 28:17; compare with Gen. 28:22*), which points to the temple, the sanctuary, the center of God's saving activity for humanity.

Yet, Jacob does not limit to the spiritual and the mystical his expression of worship and sense of awe concerning what had happened to him. That is, he wanted to respond in concrete, outward terms. Thus, Jacob decides to "give a tenth" to God, not in order to obtain God's blessing but as a grateful response to God's gift, which already has been given to him. Here again we see the idea of tithe long before the rise of the nation of Israel.

Read again Genesis 28:22. The "tithe" is taken from "all that You give me" (*Gen. 28:22, NKJV*). What important point should we take from what Jacob says here about tithe and what it is?

The Deceiver Deceived

Read Genesis 29:1–30. How and why does God allow for Laban’s deception? What lessons did Jacob learn?

The first thing that Jacob sees when he arrives at the place of destination is a stone, perhaps a hint referring back to the stone of Bethel, which signified God’s presence (*Gen. 28:18, 19*). It is this stone that will, after all, give Jacob the opportunity to interact with Rachel. When Jacob hears from the standing shepherds that Rachel is coming with her sheep to water her flock, he urges the shepherds to roll away the stone. They refuse, which gives Jacob the opportunity to do it alone, and to introduce himself to Rachel (*Gen. 29:11*).

Rachel responds by running to her family. This first contact between Jacob and Rachel was productive: “Jacob loved Rachel” (*Gen. 29:18*), so much that the seven years he worked for Laban in exchange for Rachel were like “a few days” (*Gen. 29:20*).

However, after these seven years, Jacob is deceived. On the night of the wedding, it is Leah, the elder sister, and not Rachel, whom Jacob discovers in his bed. Taking advantage of the confusion of the feast and of Jacob’s intense emotion and vulnerability, Laban had managed this trick. Interestingly, Jacob uses the same root word for “deceive” (*Gen. 29:25, NKJV*) that Isaac had used to characterize Jacob’s behavior toward his father and his brother (*Gen. 27:35*).

Note that the same thinking also is implied in the *lex talionis* (law of retaliation), “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (*Exod. 21:24; compare with Gen. 9:6*), which forces the culprit to identify with his or her victim in that the culprit faces what the victim did. In a similar way, then, what Jacob had done to someone else had now been done to him.

Jacob understands now what it means to be the victim of deception. Ironically, God teaches Jacob about his own deception through Laban’s deception. Although Jacob as “deceiver” (*Gen. 27:12*) knows well what deception means, he is surprised when he is the victim of deception. Thus, he asks the question, “‘Why . . . have you deceived me?’” (*Gen. 29:25, NKJV*), which shows that he knows deception is wrong.

Though Jacob was the deceiver, he himself was the deceived. How can we learn to trust God when we don’t see “justice” being done, when we see people who do evil get away with it, or when we see the innocent suffer?

The Blessing of the Family

For Jacob, the last seven years of exile are a burden, and yet, these also are the most fruitful years. In them, Jacob will father 11 of the 12 children who will become the ancestors of God's people.

This section constitutes the center of Jacob's story (*Gen. 25:19–35:26*), and it begins and ends with the key phrase God "opened her womb," referring to Leah (*Gen. 29:31*) and to Rachel (*Gen. 30:22*). Each time, this statement is followed by births; the evidence is that these births are the result of God's miraculous action.

Read Genesis 29:31–30:22. How are we, today, to understand the meaning of what takes place here?

God opened Leah's womb, and she had a son Reuben, whose name contains the verb *ra'ah*, which means to "see." Because God "saw" that she was unloved by Jacob (*Gen. 29:31*), this child was compensation for her in her pain and suffering.

In addition, she gives the name of Simeon, which contains the verb *shama'*, "heard," to her second son, because God had "heard" (*shama*) the depth and the humiliation of her pain and, thus, had pity on her just as He had heard Hagar's affliction (*Gen. 29:33*).

Leah's son "Simeon" also will resonate with the name of Hagar's son "Ishmael," which means "God will hear" (*see Gen. 16:11*). When Leah gives birth to her last son, she calls him Judah, which means "praise." Leah does not refer to her pain or even her blessing anymore. She just focuses on God and praises Him for His grace.

Strangely, it is only when Leah cannot give birth again that God "remembers" Rachel and opens Rachel's womb (*Gen. 30:22*). Rachel, the loved wife, had to wait seven years after her marriage, and 14 years after her betrothal with Jacob, to have her first son (*Gen. 29:18, 27; compare with Gen. 30:25*). She gave him the name of "Joseph" to signify that God had "taken away [*'asaf*] my reproach" and "shall add [*yasaf*] to me another son" (*Gen. 30:23, 24, NKJV*). However wrong some of these situations were, God was still able to use them, even if He didn't condone them, in order to create a nation from the seed of Abraham.

In what ways does this story reveal that God's purposes will be fulfilled in heaven and on earth, despite human foibles and errors?

Jacob Leaves

In this story, Jacob—who deceived his father and his brother to acquire the family birthright, and who stole the blessing that Isaac designed to give to his elder son—nevertheless remained passive toward Laban and served him faithfully. Jacob knows well that he has been deceived by his father-in-law, and yet, he let it go. It is difficult to understand Jacob’s passivity considering his temperament. Jacob could have revolted, or at least resisted Laban or bargained with him. But he didn’t. He just did what Laban asked, no matter how unfair it all was.

Nevertheless, at the birth of Rachel’s first son, Joseph, Jacob finally reached the fourteenth year of his “service” to Laban (*Gen. 30:26*), and now considers leaving Laban in order to return to the Promised Land. But Jacob is concerned about providing for his “ ‘own house’ ” (*Gen. 30:30*).

Read Genesis 30:25–32. **What is happening here, and what kind of reasoning does Jacob use? What is Laban’s response?**

It had been a very long detour for Jacob, who had long been gone from home. It probably had not been his original intention to stay away from his country for so long, but events kept him away for years. It’s now time to return home, and what a family he will return with too!

Meanwhile, Jacob’s unnatural compliance suggests that Jacob has perhaps changed; he has understood the lesson of faith. That is, Jacob waits for God’s signal to go. It is only when God speaks to him that Jacob decides to move.

God reveals Himself to Jacob as “ ‘the God of Bethel’ ” and commands Jacob to leave Laban’s house and return to “ ‘your family’ ” (*Gen. 31:13, NKJV*) with the same words that God used to call Abram to leave “ ‘from your family’ ” (*Gen. 12:1, NKJV*).

What helped him see that it was time to go, too, was the attitude of Laban’s sons and Laban himself (*see Gen. 31:1, 2*). “Jacob would have left his crafty kinsman long before but for the fear of encountering Esau. Now he felt that he was in danger from the sons of Laban, who, looking upon his wealth as their own, might endeavor to secure it by violence.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 193.

Hence, he took his family and possessions and left, thus beginning another phase in the great saga of God’s covenant people.

Further Thought: God chose Jacob, not because he deserved it, but because of His grace. And yet, Jacob worked hard to try to deserve grace, which itself is a contradiction. If he deserved it, then it wouldn't be grace; it would be works (*see Rom. 4:1-5*), which is contrary to the gospel. Only later did Jacob start to understand the significance of God's grace and what it meant to trust God, to live by faith, and to be completely dependent on the Lord. Jacob's experience contains an important lesson for the ambitious person: do not strive to promote yourself at the expense of others.

"Jacob thought to gain a right to the birthright through deception, but he found himself disappointed. He thought he had lost everything, his connection with God, his home, and all, and there he was a disappointed fugitive. But what did God do? He looked upon him in his hopeless condition, He saw his disappointment, and He saw there was material there that would render back glory to God. No sooner does He see his condition than He presents the mystic ladder, which represents Jesus Christ. Here is man, who had lost all connection with God, and the God of heaven looks upon him and consents that Christ shall bridge the gulf which sin has made. We might have looked and said, I long for heaven but how can I reach it? I see no way. That is what Jacob thought, and so God shows him the vision of the ladder, and that ladder connects earth with heaven, with Jesus Christ. A man can climb it, for the base rests upon the earth and the top-most round reaches into heaven."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1095.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at the characters of these people (Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Esau, Laban, Rachel, Leah) in some of these accounts of sacred history. Look at all the lies and deception involved. What does this teach us about human nature in general and God's grace?
- 2 As you read the story of Jacob, what evidence can you find that over time his character was maturing and growing?

My Most Valuable Possession

By THEDA PIENAAR

As is my custom, I opened my Bible to read on a flight from Namibia to South Africa. Immediately, a young man beside me spoke up.

“Is that a Bible?” he asked. He apparently was from Eastern Europe.

“Yes, it’s a Bible,” I said.

“Do you believe in the Bible?” he inquired.

“Yes, with all my heart.”

He said his grandparents used to read the Bible to him but that he didn’t believe the stories, especially Creation. I shared my life-changing experience as a person who had returned to God after 15 years on my own and was led by Him to a place of safety in the world. He was interested in my story.

“Can I hold your Bible, please?” he asked.

It was thrilling to see my Bible in his hands. It seemed to make a big impression on him. After he handed it back, I read out loud from Isaiah 43. He listened with interest to God’s promises of protection.

Before the plane landed, I asked, “Would you accept a gift?” In my bag, I had a copy of *Steps to Christ*. He didn’t want to take the book, but I assured him that I had another copy. “If you have any questions, please text me,” I said, writing my phone number inside the cover.

To my surprise, within a day of my arrival home in Ireland, he texted, “I’m home safely.” I prayed, “I don’t think this is a coincidence.” He wrote that he had met a woman in Namibia who prayed daily. “Seeing that, I started thinking about my grandparents reading the Bible, and then I met you,” he said.

“I don’t believe in coincidences,” I said. “Let God to speak to your heart.”

We texted every so often, and I sent Bible verses. One day, he sent me a picture of a church. “I live next to this church,” he said.

I replied that I wanted to mail him a history of the Christian church and, when I received his address, I sent him *The Great Controversy*.

Sometime later, someone sent me a video about the plan of salvation, and I passed it on to him. He responded, “This is so amazing.”

I prayed, “Lord, I need to know what might work in his life.” A strong thought came to mind: *He held your Bible. Give him your Bible.*

I have decided to mail my Bible to him. I have written a letter, saying, “This is my most precious possession. God gave His only Son, the most precious thing that He had, for our salvation. I hope you will read this, my most precious possession.”

This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan, “To disciple individuals and families into spirit-filled lives.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org.



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Jacob-Israel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 32:22–31; Hos. 12:3, 4; Jer. 30:5–7; Genesis 33; Gen. 34:30–35:29.*

Memory Text: “And He said, ‘Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed’ ” (*Genesis 32:28, NKJV*).

The family saga of Jacob continues, both the good and the bad. Yet, through it all, the hand of God and His faithfulness to the covenant promises are revealed.

This week follows more of Jacob, now that he had left Laban and, returning home, had to face Esau, the victim of Jacob's treachery. What would his brother, so grievously wronged, now do to him?

Fortunately for Jacob, amid the fear of what was coming, the Lord God of his fathers appeared again to him in an incident that was a precursor to what would later become known as the “time of Jacob's trouble” (*see Jer. 30:5–7*). And that night Jacob, the supplanter, became “Israel,” a new name for a new beginning, a beginning that would ultimately lead to the creation of a nation itself named after him.

In other words, despite all that happens, the story of the patriarchs and their family is told in Scripture in order to show us that God is faithful to fulfill what He has promised and that He will do so despite what, at times, seems to be nothing but His people doing all that they can to stop that fulfillment.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 4.*

Wrestling With God

Gone from Laban, Jacob soon has another experience with God. Knowing that his brother, Esau, is coming with “four hundred men” (*Gen. 32:6*), Jacob prays fervently to the Lord, even though he acknowledges that “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant” (*Gen. 32:10, NKJV*). Jacob, truly, has a better understanding of what grace was about.

And how does the Lord respond?

Read Genesis 32:22–31 and Hosea 12:3, 4. What is the spiritual significance of this amazing story?

Jacob is distressed, understandably so, by what is happening, and after doing what he can to protect his family, he camps for the night. He is then suddenly attacked by “a Man” (*Gen. 32:24, NKJV*). This is a term that can have special connotations, evoking the divine presence (*see Isa. 53:3*). Daniel used it to refer to the heavenly priest Michael (*Dan. 10:5*); it also was the word used by Joshua to depict the “Commander of the LORD’s army,” who was the LORD YHWH Himself (*Josh. 5:13–15, NKJV*).

Indeed, amid the fighting, it must have become obvious to Jacob that he was struggling with God Himself, as his words, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” (*Gen. 32:26, NKJV*), revealed. Yet, his fervent clinging to God, his refusal to let go, also revealed his passionate desire for forgiveness and to be right with his Lord.

“The error that had led to Jacob’s sin in obtaining the birthright by fraud was now clearly set before him. He had not trusted God’s promises, but had sought by his own efforts to bring about that which God would have accomplished in His own time and way.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 197, 198.

And the evidence that he had been forgiven was the change of his name from the reminder of his sin to one that commemorated his victory. “Your name,” said the Angel, “shall no longer be called Jacob [the supplanter], but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed” (*Gen. 32:28, NKJV*).

What has been your own experience as far as wrestling with God goes? What does it mean to do that, and why is it at times important that we have this kind of experience?

The Brothers Meet

From Peniel, “the face of God” (*see Gen. 32:30*), the place where he had this experience with God, Jacob moves now to meet with his brother. After 20 years of separation, Jacob sees him coming with 400 men (*Gen. 33:1*). Jacob is worried and, therefore, prepares himself and his family for whatever might happen.

Read Genesis 33. What connection is there between Jacob’s experience of seeing the face of God at Peniel and Jacob’s experience of seeing the face of his brother? What is the implication of this connection in regard to our relationship with God and our relationship with our “brothers,” whoever they may be?

Jacob bows himself seven times before his brother (*Gen. 33:3*), whom he calls several times “ ‘my lord’ ” (*Gen. 33:8, 13, 15, NKJV*) and with whom he identifies himself as his “ ‘servant’ ” (*Gen. 33:5; compare with Gen. 32:4, 18, 20, NKJV*). Significantly, Jacob’s seven bows echo his father’s seven blessings (*Gen. 27:27–29*); furthermore, when he bows, he specifically reverses his father’s blessing, about “ ‘nations [bowing] down to you’ ” (*Gen. 27:29, NKJV*).

It is as if Jacob’s intention was to pay his debt to his brother and return the blessing that he had stolen from him (*see Gen. 33:11*). When Esau saw his brother, against all expectations, he ran to Jacob and, instead of killing him, he “kissed him, and they wept” (*Gen. 33:4, NKJV*).

Later, Jacob commented to Esau: “ ‘I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God’ ” (*Gen. 33:10, NKJV*). The reason for Jacob’s extraordinary statement was his understanding that Esau had forgiven him. The Hebrew verb *ratsah*, “pleased” (*Gen. 33:10, NKJV*), is a theological term referring to any sacrifice that is “pleasing,” “accepted” by God, which then implies divine forgiveness (*Lev. 22:27, Amos 5:22*).

Jacob’s experience of God’s forgiveness at Peniel, where he saw the face of God, is now repeated in his experience of his brother’s forgiveness, which he identifies as if he saw the face of God. Jacob lives a second Peniel, the first one preparing for the second one. Jacob has been forgiven by God and by his own brother. Truly, he now must have understood, even more than before, the meaning of grace.

What have you learned about grace from how others (besides the Lord) have forgiven you?

The Violation of Dinah

Now that Jacob has reconciled with his brother, he wants to settle in the land of Canaan in peace. The word *shalem*, “safely” (*Gen. 33:18, NKJV*), from the word *shalom*, “peace,” for the first time characterizes his journey.

After having purchased a piece of land from the inhabitants (*Gen. 33:19*), he erects an altar there, showing his faith and his realization of how dependent upon the Lord he really is. For every one of the sacrifices offered, there was an act of worship.

Yet, for the first time in his life, Jacob-Israel is exposed to the troubles of settling in the land. Like Isaac at Gerar with Abimelech (*Gen. 26:1–33*), Jacob tries to find accommodation with the Canaanites.

Read Genesis 34. What happened to upset his plans for a peaceful existence?

The story of this sordid incident highlights the ambiguity of the characters and of their actions. The sensual Shechem, who violates Dinah, also is characterized as sincere and loving Dinah, and he wants to try to make amends. He is even willing to undergo the covenant rite of circumcision.

Meanwhile, Simeon and Levi, who present themselves as the defenders of God and His commandments, and who resist intermarriage with the Canaanites (*Lev. 19:29*), resort to lies and deception (*Gen. 34:13*) and are ready to kill and plunder (*Gen. 34:25–27*). Their actions were not only reprehensible (why not punish the one man who had done it?) but also had the potential to cause many more problems.

As for Jacob, he only is concerned with peace. When the rape of his daughter is reported to him, he does not say anything (*Gen. 34:5*). However, after he hears about what his sons have done, he openly chides them because of what could follow: “You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I” (*Gen. 34:30, NKJV*).

Again and again we see deceit and deception, as well as acts of kindness and grace, in these accounts. What does this tell us about human nature?

Prevailing Idolatry

Read Genesis 34:30–35:15. What lessons can we take about true worship from what happened here?

Immediately after Jacob’s complaint that his peace with the Canaanites had been compromised (*Gen. 34:30*), and after his two sons were rebuked (*Gen. 34:30*), God urges Jacob to leave Shechem and return to Bethel in order to renew his covenant. Indeed, the Lord tells him that, once he gets there, he needs to build an altar.

Meanwhile, the first thing recorded after God’s command is Jacob’s telling his people to put away the Canaanite idols, which had been taken in the plunder of the city of Shechem, and the household gods that had been stolen by Rachel (*Gen. 31:19, 32*). All this, too, is crucial to the idea of the covenant with God.

These idols had been kept and, probably, worshiped in spite of Jacob’s commitment to God. It was not enough for Jacob to leave Shechem in order to escape Canaanite influence. Jacob had to get rid of the idols within the camp and in the hearts of his people.

The process of repentance consists in more than a physical move from one place to another, or a move from one church to another. Most important, it is that we seek by God’s grace to purge the idolatry in our hearts, regardless of where we live, because we can make idols out of just about anything.

When Jacob obeys God and proceeds according to God’s commandment, God finally intervenes and “the terror of God” (*Gen. 35:5, NKJV*) affects all the people around them, and they do not dare attack Jacob. Jacob is, then, ready to worship with “all the people who were with him” (*Gen. 35:6, NKJV*), suggesting that the family unity has been restored. Jacob gives this place the name El Bethel, a reminder of his dream of the ladder, a sign that the connection between heaven and earth, which had been broken for some time, has now been restored.

The emphasis is, this time, on the God of Bethel rather than on the place itself. This personal note resonates again when God reminds Jacob of his name “Israel” (*Gen. 35:10*), with the double promise that this blessing implies. Jacob’s blessing, first, means fruitfulness, the transmission of the Messianic seed and the generation of many nations (*Gen. 35:11*); and second, it points to the Promised Land (*Gen. 35:12*).

What are subtle ways that idolatry can find its way into our hearts, and what can we do about it?

The Death of Rachel

Read Genesis 35:15–29. What other woes did Jacob face within his dysfunctional family?

As soon as Jacob leaves Bethel, three interrelated incidents mark the last step of his journey toward the Promised Land: Jacob’s last son is born; Rachel dies; and Reuben, Jacob’s first son by Leah, sleeps with Jacob’s concubine. Though the text doesn’t say why the young man would do something so evil, it could have been that he wanted to somehow defile the birth of Jacob’s last son and to humiliate the memory of Rachel. We just don’t know.

The birth of Jacob’s last son is linked to Bethlehem (*Gen. 35:19*), which is within the confines of the Promised Land. This birth is, then, the first fulfillment of God’s promise for the future of Israel. The midwife, prophetically, addresses Rachel with the very words God used to reassure Abraham: “Do not fear” (*Gen. 35:17, NKJV, compare with Gen. 15:1*).

Significantly, Jacob changes the name that the dying Rachel had given to her son, Ben-Oni, meaning “son of my sorrow” to signify her pain, into Benjamin, meaning “son of the right hand,” perhaps implying the direction of the south in order to express his hope in the Promised Land and all that God said He would do for His people after they had settled there.

Yet, during this time Reuben has sexual relations with Bilhah, his father’s concubine and Rachel’s maidservant (*Gen. 35:25, Gen. 30:3*). We just don’t know why he performed this scandalous act, other than as another example of human depravity.

Amazingly, Jacob does not respond to this horrible violation, even though he is told about it (*Gen. 35:22*). Perhaps at this point in his life, Jacob trusts that God will fulfill His word despite the sin and evil, at times, that goes on around him.

It is this precise lesson of faith that is implied in the list of Jacob’s 12 sons, who will be the ancestors of Israel (*Gen. 35:22–26*)—not the most savory and kindest of people, as we will see. Yet, despite all the problems, all the dysfunction, even outright evil, such as Reuben’s sin with Bilhah, God’s will was going to be fulfilled through this family, no matter how messed up this family really was.

Despite human error, God’s ultimate purposes will be fulfilled. Imagine what would happen if people cooperated, if they obeyed Him. How much more easily—that is, with less human suffering and stress and delay—could God’s will then be accomplished?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Night of Wrestling,” pp. 195–203, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Jacob’s experience during that night of wrestling and anguish represents the trial through which the people of God must pass just before Christ’s second coming. . . . Such will be the experience of God’s people in their final struggle with the powers of evil. God will test their faith, their perseverance, their confidence in His power to deliver them. Satan will endeavor to terrify them with the thought that their cases are hopeless; that their sins have been too great to receive pardon. They will have a deep sense of their shortcomings, and as they review their lives their hopes will sink. But remembering the greatness of God’s mercy, and their own sincere repentance, they will plead His promises made through Christ to helpless, repenting sinners. Their faith will not fail because their prayers are not immediately answered. They will lay hold of the strength of God, as Jacob laid hold of the Angel, and the language of their souls will be, ‘I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.’ . . .

“Yet Jacob’s history is an assurance that God will not cast off those who have been betrayed into sin, but who have returned unto Him with true repentance. It was by self-surrender and confiding faith that Jacob gained what he had failed to gain by conflict in his own strength. God thus taught His servant that divine power and grace alone could give him the blessing he craved. Thus it will be with those who live in the last days. As dangers surround them, and despair seizes upon the soul, they must depend solely upon the merits of the atonement. We can do nothing of ourselves.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 201–203.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is Jacob’s weakness the occasion for God’s grace? How does Jacob’s experience relate to Paul’s statement, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10, NKJV)?
- 2 Why do you think the Bible reveals so many sordid details about the lives of many of its characters? What point could be made from doing this? What message can we take from it?
- 3 Dwell more on the question of idolatry. What are the idols of our culture, our civilization? How can we make sure we aren’t worshipping anyone or anything other than the Lord?

Double Answer to Prayer

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The first-year theology student ran to the worship room at Zaoksky Adventist University south of Moscow, Russia. Falling on his knees, he prayed, “Lord, why are You blessing me? I am so sinful.”

Twenty-year-old Vadim Antyushin felt an overwhelming sense of his unworthiness of God’s blessings. He felt unworthy to study at the university and of the calling to become a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. He had just started his first semester of classes and, moments earlier, had unexpectedly received a gift of US\$100. It was a significant sum for him. “Lord, I’m unworthy of this money,” Vadim prayed. “You have provided for all my needs, and I lack nothing. Show me what to do with the money.” Vadim exchanged the US dollars for Russian rubles. After tithing, 6,000 rubles remained.

Vadim joined a small group of students who met once a week to pray and, a few days later, heard one of the students ask for prayers about his financial situation. Vadim listened silently. He didn’t know the student, and he didn’t know how much money he needed for his tuition. That night, Vadim returned to the worship room to pray. “Lord,” he said, “I would like to give the money to my classmate. Please bless this plan according to Your will.”

The next day, Vadim pulled aside his classmate to speak privately.

“How much money do you need for your studies?” he asked.

“Six thousand rubles,” the classmate replied.

Stunned, Vadim realized that God had answered his prayers. Not only that, but God had also answered the prayers of his classmate. Vadim joyfully gave the 6,000 rubles to his astonished classmate. The two embraced.

Two years later, the classmate has become one of Vadim’s best friends.

“He and I have gone through a lot together, and he has helped me in so many ways,” Vadim said in an interview. “Thank God that I have acquired such a friend. Thank God that He takes care of our needs long before we even know that we have a need. Before we ask, He knows what to give and through whom to give it. The main thing is to trust Him.”

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:19, 20, NKJV).

This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5, “To disciple individuals and families into spirit-filled lives,” and Spiritual Growth Objective No. 7, “To help youth and young adults place God first and exemplify a biblical worldview.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org.



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Joseph, Master of Dreams



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 37; Matt. 20:26, 27; Acts 7:9; Genesis 38; Genesis 39; Gen. 40:1–41:36.*

Memory Text: “Then they said to one another, ‘Look, this dreamer is coming!’” (*Genesis 37:19, NKJV*).

The story of Joseph (*Genesis 37–50*) covers the last section of the book of Genesis, from his first dreams in Canaan (*Gen. 37:1–11*) to his death in Egypt (*Gen. 50:26*). In fact, Joseph occupies more space in the book of Genesis than does any other patriarch. Although Joseph is just one of Jacob's sons, he is presented in Genesis as a great patriarch, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As we will see, too, the life of Joseph highlights two important theological truths: first, God fulfills His promises; second, God can turn evil into good.

In this week's study, we will focus on the early life of Joseph. He is Jacob's favorite son, who is ironically nicknamed *ba'al hakhalomot*, the “dreamer” (*Gen. 37:19*), which means literally “master of dreams,” implying that he is an expert of dreams. This title fits him very well, because he not only receives, understands, and interprets prophetic dreams, but he also fulfills them in his life, as well.

In these chapters, we will see, again, that God's providence is affirmed, despite the evil and wickedness of the human heart.

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

Family Troubles

Jacob has, at last, settled in the land. While Isaac was only “a stranger,” the text also says that Jacob “dwelt in the land” (*Gen. 37:1*). Yet, it was then, as he was settling into the land, that the troubles began, this time from inside the family. The controversy does not concern the possession of the land or the use of a well; it is, mainly, spiritual.

Read Genesis 37:1–11. What family dynamic predisposed Joseph’s brothers to hate him so much?

From the very beginning, we understand that Joseph, the son of Jacob’s old age (*Gen. 37:3*), enjoyed a special relationship with his father, who “loved him more than all his brothers” (*Gen. 37:4, NKJV*). Jacob even went so far as to make Joseph “a tunic of many colors” (*Gen. 37:3, NKJV*), a prince’s garment (*2 Sam. 13:18*), an indication of Jacob’s secret intention to elevate Joseph, Rachel’s first son, to the status of firstborn.

The future will, indeed, confirm Jacob’s wishes because Joseph eventually will receive the rights of the firstborn (*1 Chron. 5:2*). No wonder, then, that Joseph’s brothers hated him so much and could not even engage in peaceful conversations with him (*Gen. 37:4*).

Furthermore, Joseph would bring bad reports to his father about any reprehensible behavior from his brothers (*Gen. 37:2*). No one likes a snitch.

So, when Joseph shared his dreams, suggesting that God would put him in a higher position and that they, his brothers, would bow before him, they hated him even more. The genuine prophetic character of the dreams was even ratified by the fact that they are repeated (*see Gen. 41:32*). Although Jacob openly rebuked his son (*Gen. 37:10*), he kept this incident in his mind, meditating on its meaning and waiting for its fulfillment (*Gen. 37:11*). The implication is that, perhaps, deep down he thought there might be something to these dreams after all. He was right, however much he couldn’t know it at the time.

Read Matthew 20:26, 27. What crucial principle is revealed here, and how can we learn to manifest in our own lives what it teaches?

The Attack on Joseph

However horrible the events that were to follow, they're not hard to comprehend. To be in that close proximity to, and even to be related to, someone whom you hated would inevitably lead, sooner or later, only to trouble.

And it did.

Read Genesis 37:12–36. What does this teach us about how dangerous and evil unregenerate hearts can be and what they can lead any one of us to do?

The brothers hate Joseph because they are jealous of God's favor (*Acts 7:9*), a favor that will be confirmed at each step in the next course of events. When Joseph has lost his way, a man finds him and guides him (*Gen. 37:15*). When Joseph's brothers plot to kill him, Reuben intervenes and suggests that he be thrown into a pit instead (*Gen. 37:20–22*).

It's hard to imagine the kind of hatred expressed here, especially for someone of their own household. How could these young men have done something so cruel? Did they not think, even for a few moments, about how this would impact their own father? Whatever resentment they might have had toward their father because he favored Joseph, to do this to one of his children was, truly, despicable. What a powerful manifestation of just how evil human beings can be.

"But some of them [the brothers] were ill at ease; they did not feel the satisfaction they had anticipated from their revenge. Soon a company of travelers was seen approaching. It was a caravan of Ishmaelites from beyond Jordan, on their way to Egypt with spices and other merchandise. Judah now proposed to sell their brother to these heathen traders instead of leaving him to die. While he would be effectually put out of their way, they would remain clear of his blood."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 211.

After they cast him into the pit, planning to kill him later, a caravan passes, and Judah proposes to his brothers to sell Joseph to them (*Gen. 37:26, 27*). After Joseph is sold to the Midianites (*Gen. 37:28*), the Midianites sell him to someone in Egypt (*Gen. 37:36*), thus anticipating his future glory.

Why is it so important to seek God's power in order to change bad traits of character before they can manifest themselves in acts that, at one point in your life, you would never have imagined yourself doing?

Judah and Tamar

The story of Tamar is not out of place here. This incident follows chronologically the sale of Joseph in Egypt (*Gen. 38:1*), and it is consistent with the fact that Judah has just left his brothers, which points to his disagreement with them. In addition, the text shares a number of common words and motifs with the preceding chapter, and it carries the same theological lesson: an evil act will be turned into a positive event linked to salvation.

Read Genesis 38. Compare Judah’s behavior with that of the Canaanite Tamar. Who of the two is more righteous, and why?

Judah finds a Canaanite wife (*Gen. 38:2*) with whom he has three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Judah gives the Canaanite Tamar as wife to Er, his firstborn, in order to ensure proper genealogy. When Er and Onan are killed by God because of their wickedness, Judah promises his last son, Shelah, to Tamar.

When, after some time, Judah seems to have forgotten his promise, as he goes to comfort himself after the death of his wife, Tamar decides to play the prostitute in order to force him to fulfill his promise. Because Judah has no cash to pay the prostitute, whom he does not recognize, he promises to send her, later, a goat from his flock.

Tamar requires that, in the meantime, he give her his signet and cord and his staff as an immediate guarantee of payment. Tamar will get pregnant from this unique encounter. When, later, accused of playing the harlot, she will show to the accuser, Judah, his signet and cord and his staff. Judah understands and apologizes.

The conclusion of this sordid story is the birth of Perez, meaning “breaking through,” who, like Jacob, is born second, and becomes first, and is named in salvation history as the ancestor of David (*Ruth 4:18–22*), and ultimately of Jesus Christ (*Matt. 1:3*). As for Tamar, she is the first of the four women—followed by Rahab (*Matt. 1:5*), Ruth (*Matt. 1:5, 6*), and the wife of Uriah (*Matt. 1:6*)—who genealogically preceded Mary, the mother of Jesus (*Matt. 1:16*).

One lesson we can take from this story: just as God saved Tamar through His grace, transforming evil into good, so will He save His people through the cross of Jesus. And in the case of Joseph, He will turn his troubles into the salvation of Jacob and his sons.

Joseph, a Slave in Egypt

We now pick up the flow of Joseph's stories, which have been "interrupted" by the Tamar incident. Joseph is now working as a slave for the "captain of the guard," who is in charge of the prison for royal officials (*Gen. 40:3, 4; Gen. 41:10-12*).

Read Genesis 39. In light of the example of Joseph's working as a manager under Potiphar, what are the factors that led to such success?

Almost immediately, Joseph was characterized as a man of success (*Gen. 39:2, 3*). He was so good, and his master so trusted him that "all that he had he put into his hand," and Potiphar even made him "overseer over his house" (*Gen 39:4*).

Joseph's success, however, does not corrupt him. When Potiphar's wife notices him and wants to sleep with him, Joseph unambiguously refuses and prefers to lose his job and his security rather than "do this great wickedness, and sin against God" (*Gen. 39:9*). The woman, humiliated by Joseph's refusal, reports falsely to her servants and to her husband that Joseph wanted to rape her. As a result, Joseph is cast into prison.

Joseph experiences here what we all have experienced: the sense of abandonment by God, though, even in this difficult time, "the LORD was with Joseph" (*Gen. 39:21*).

Eventually, the Lord acts, and it has an impact on Joseph's relationship with the officer of the prison. Here, too, as in his master's house, the Lord blesses Joseph. He obviously is a gifted man, and despite even worse circumstances now (after all, before, he was still a slave!), he seeks to make the best of it. Whatever his gifts, however, the text makes it clear that, in the end, it was only God who brought him success. "The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper" (*Gen. 39:23, NKJV*). How important that all who are gifted, all who are "successful," remember where it all comes from!

Read Genesis 39:7-12. How did Joseph resist the advances of Potiphar's wife? Why did Joseph specifically say that to do what she asked would be a sin against God? What understanding does he show of the nature of sin and what it is?

The Dreams of Pharaoh

Read Genesis 40:1–41:36. How are the dreams of Pharaoh related to the dreams of the officers? What is the significance of this parallel?

The providential character of the events continues. Over time, Joseph is put in charge of the prisoners, two of whom happen to be former officers of Pharaoh, a butler and a baker (*Gen. 41:9–11*). They are both troubled by dreams that they cannot understand, because “there is no interpreter” (*Gen. 40:8*). Joseph, then, interprets their respective dreams.

In a parallel to the two officers’ dreams, Pharaoh also has two dreams, which no one can interpret (*Gen. 41:1–8*). At that moment the butler providentially remembers Joseph and recommends him to Pharaoh (*Gen. 41:9–13*).

In a parallel to the other dreams, Pharaoh, like the officers, is troubled, and, like them, reveals his dreams (*Gen. 41:14–24*), and Joseph interprets them. Like the officers’ dreams, Pharaoh’s dreams display parallels of symbols: the two series of seven cows (fat and gaunt) just as the two series of heads of grain (plump and thin) represent two series of years, one good and one bad. The seven cows parallel the seven heads of grain, repeating the same message, an evidence of their divine origin, just like Joseph’s dreams (*Gen. 41:32; compare with Gen. 37:9*).

Though Joseph is the one who interpreted the dream for Pharaoh, Joseph makes certain that Pharaoh knows that it was God, *Elohim*, who showed the king the things that He, God, was going to do (*Gen. 41:25, 28*). It seems, too, that Pharaoh got the message because, when he decided to appoint someone to be over the land, his argument was as follows:

“Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word” (*Gen. 41:39, 40, NKJV*).

How fascinating: thanks to God, Joseph goes from ruler over Potiphar’s house to ruler over the prison to ruler over all of Egypt. What a powerful story about how, even amid what look like terrible circumstances, God’s providences are revealed.

How can we learn to trust God and cling to His promises when events don’t appear providential at all, and indeed, God seems silent?

Further Thought: Ellen G. White, “Joseph in Egypt,” pp. 213–223, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“In early life, just as they were passing from youth to manhood, Joseph and Daniel were separated from their homes and carried as captives to heathen lands. Especially was Joseph subject to the temptations that attend great changes of fortune. In his father’s home a tenderly cherished child; in the house of Potiphar a slave, then a confidant and companion; a man of affairs, educated by study, observation, contact with men; in Pharaoh’s dungeon a prisoner of state, condemned unjustly, without hope of vindication or prospect of release; called at a great crisis to the leadership of the nation—what enabled him to preserve his integrity? . . .

“In his childhood, Joseph had been taught the love and fear of God. Often in his father’s tent, under the Syrian stars, he had been told the story of the night vision at Bethel, of the ladder from heaven to earth, and the descending and ascending angels, and of Him who from the throne above revealed Himself to Jacob. He had been told the story of the conflict beside the Jabbok, when, renouncing cherished sins, Jacob stood conqueror, and received the title of a prince with God.

“A shepherd boy, tending his father’s flocks, Joseph’s pure and simple life had favored the development of both physical and mental power. By communion with God through nature and the study of the great truths handed down as a sacred trust from father to son, he had gained strength of mind and firmness of principle.

“In the crisis of his life, when making that terrible journey from his childhood home in Canaan to the bondage which awaited him in Egypt, looking for the last time on the hills that hid the tents of his kindred, Joseph remembered his father’s God. He remembered the lessons of his childhood, and his soul thrilled with the resolve to prove himself true—ever to act as became a subject of the King of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 51, 52.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Compare Joseph with Daniel and Jesus. What are their common points? How do Joseph and Daniel, in their own ways, reveal aspects of what Jesus would be like?
- 2 In class, talk about the question at the end of Thursday’s study. How do we learn to trust God when things don’t turn out as well for us as they did, eventually, for Joseph?

An Eternal Gift

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Tragedy struck young Vishalini's life when her parents divorced over a misunderstanding in the extended family. Vishalini sadly said goodbye to Mother after Father gained custody of her. Before long, Father remarried, and Vishalini had a stepmother. Vishalini felt so alone.

Her new stepmother did not like Mother at all.

Vishalini deeply loved Mother, and she looked forward to her occasional visits. The girl would smile and give Mother a big hug. Mother also smiled and gave Vishalini a big hug. Mother often had something else for the girl as well. She brought gifts. "Here is something for you," Mother would say, pressing tasty treats into her little hand.

Vishalini smiled happily. She liked gifts and she liked tasty treats. But before she could eat them, her stepmother often snatched them away. "You are not allowed to accept any of her gifts," her stepmother said sharply.

Vishalini felt so alone. She grew up into a teenager, and Father sent her away to study at a boarding school in another part of Tamil Nadu state. It was scary to leave home for the first time, but Vishalini was glad to be away from family tensions and to be among friendly children and teachers. As the weeks passed, she became especially interested in hearing about Someone whom the children called "the real God." She wanted to know more, and she began to learn about Jesus.

Today, Vishalini calls Jesus her Friend and says she will never feel alone again. Why? Because Jesus has promised, "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (*Matthew 28:20, NKJV*). Vishalini has one Gift that no one can ever take away.

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that helped construct a new girls' dormitory at Vishalini's school, James Memorial Higher Secondary School, in Tamil Nadu state in southeastern India. The new dormitory allowed Vishalini and the other girls to move out of a dilapidated building that no longer was a healthy place to live.

This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: Mission Objective No. 2, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions"; Mission Objective No. 3, "To make developing resources for mission to non-Christian religions and belief systems a high priority"; and Spiritual Growth Objective No. 7, "To help youth and young adults place God first and exemplify a biblical worldview." Read more: IWillGo2020.org.



Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

Joseph, Prince of Egypt



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 41:37–46, 1 Kings 3:12, Genesis 42, Rom. 5:7–11, Genesis 43, Genesis 44, Genesis 45.*

Memory Text: “And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt’ ” (*Genesis 41:41, NKJV*).

Joseph is now leader of Egypt, and his own brothers will bow before him without knowing who he is (*Genesis 42*). Joseph's brothers will humble themselves when Joseph forces them to return with Benjamin (*Genesis 43*), and—when Benjamin's safety is, they fear, threatened (*Genesis 44*)—they will plead for grace before this powerful man, whom they see as “like Pharaoh.” In the end, when Joseph reveals his identity, they will understand that, despite what they have done, God has brought good out of it all.

Interestingly, this whole next sequence of events, which were supposed to be about Joseph's success, are more about his brothers' repentance. Their back-and-forth journeys from Joseph to their father, and the obstacles they encounter, make them remember their wicked acts toward Joseph and their father, and they realize their iniquity toward God. Joseph's brothers live that whole experience as a divine judgment. And yet, the moving emotional conclusion, which brings everyone to tears and joy, also contains a message of forgiveness for them, despite their unjustifiable acts of evil.

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

Joseph's Rise to Power

For Joseph, Pharaoh's dreams revealed what God was "about to do" (*Gen. 41:28, NKJV*) in the land. Joseph, however, does not call on Pharaoh to believe in his God. Instead, Joseph's immediate response is action. Joseph proposes an economic program. Interestingly, only the economic part of Joseph's discourse is retained by Pharaoh, who seems more interested in the economic lesson than in the spiritual meaning of the dream and God's role in producing it.

Read Genesis 41:37–57. What is God's place in the success of Joseph?

Pharaoh selects Joseph to take charge not so much because he has interpreted his dreams correctly and revealed the forthcoming problem of the land, but because he has a solution to that problem, because his "advice was good" (*Gen. 41:37, NKJV*), an opinion also shared by Pharaoh's servants. Pharaoh's choice seems to have been more pragmatic than religious. And yet, Pharaoh recognizes that the presence of "the Spirit of God" (*Gen. 41:38*) is in Joseph, who is qualified as "discerning and wise" (*Gen. 41:39*), an expression that characterizes the wisdom that God gives (see *Gen. 41:33; compare with 1 Kings 3:12*).

All the details reported in the biblical text fit the historical situation of Egypt at that time. Politically, the fact that Pharaoh appoints Joseph as vizier is not unusual in ancient Egypt, where cases of foreign viziers have been attested.

The next seven years are years of abundance in such a marked way that the grain production becomes "immeasurable" (*Gen. 41:49, NKJV*), a sign of supernatural providence. The comparison "as the sand of the sea" (*Gen. 41:49*) reveals that this is God's blessing (*Gen. 22:17*). Joseph personally reflects that blessing in his own fruitfulness, a coincidence that evidences the presence of the same God behind the two phenomena. Joseph has two sons whose names show Joseph's experience of God's providence, which has transformed the memory of pain into joy (Manasseh) and the former affliction into fruitfulness (Ephraim). What a powerful example of how God turned something bad into something very good!

What are ways that others should be able to see, from the kind of lives that we live, the reality of our God?

Joseph Confronts His Brothers

Read Genesis 42. What happened here, and how does it reveal the providence of God, despite human evil and malfeasance?

The famine obliges Jacob to send his sons to Egypt to buy grain. Ironically, it is Jacob who initiates the project (*Gen. 42:1*). The unfortunate old man, a victim of circumstances beyond his control, unknowingly sets in motion an amazing chain of events that will lead to being reunited with the son for whom he had mourned so long.

The providential nature of this meeting is highlighted through two fundamental characters. First, it is seen as a fulfillment of Joseph’s dreams. The event—predicted in Joseph’s prophetic dreams: “ ‘your sheaves . . . bowed down to my sheaf’ ” (*Gen. 37:7, NKJV*)—is now taking place. Joseph is identified as the “governor over the land” (*Gen. 42:6*) and “the lord of the land” (*Gen. 42:30, 33*). Joseph’s powerful position contrasts with that of his needy brothers, who “bowed down before him with their faces to the earth” (*Gen. 42:6, NKJV*)—the same ten brothers who mocked Joseph about his dream and doubted its fulfillment (*Gen. 37:8*).

Second, this providential meeting is described as a response. The linguistic and thematic echoes between the two events underline the character of just retribution. The phrase “they said to one another” (*Gen. 42:21, NKJV*) also was used when they began to plot against Joseph (*Gen. 37:19*). The brothers’ sojourn in prison (*Gen. 42:17*) echoes Joseph’s sojourn in prison (*Gen. 40:3, 4*). In fact, Joseph’s brothers relate what is currently happening to them to what they did to their brother perhaps 20 years ago. “Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us’ ” (*Gen. 42:21, NKJV*).

Reuben’s words, “ ‘his blood is now required of us’ ” (*Gen. 42:22, NKJV*), which echo his past warning to “ ‘shed no blood’ ” (*Gen. 37:22, NKJV*), reinforce the link between what they are now facing and what they had done.

Most of us, surely, have done things for which we are sorry. How can we, to whatever degree possible, make up for what we have done? Also, why is accepting God’s promises of forgiveness through Jesus so crucial for us (see *Rom. 5:7–11*)?

Joseph and Benjamin

Jacob could not easily allow the departure of Benjamin, his only son with Rachel who remained with him. He was afraid that he would lose him, as he already had lost Joseph (*Gen. 43:6–8*). It was only when there was no more food (*Gen. 43:2*) and when Judah pledged to guarantee the return of Benjamin (*Gen. 43:9*) that Jacob finally consented to a second visit to Egypt and allowed Benjamin to go with his brothers.

Read Genesis 43. What effect did Benjamin’s presence have on the course of events?

Benjamin’s presence dominated the events. When all the brothers stand before Joseph, Benjamin is the only person whom Joseph sees (*Gen. 43:16*). Benjamin is the only one who is called “brother” (*Gen. 43:29, NKJV*). While Benjamin is called by name, all the other brothers are not identified; they are simply referred to as “men” (*Gen. 43:16*).

Joseph calls Benjamin “‘my son,’ ” as a reassuring expression of special affection (*Gen. 43:29; compare with Gen. 22:8*). Joseph’s blessing refers to “grace” (*Gen. 43:29*), reminiscent of his begging for grace, which was not forthcoming (*Gen. 42:21*). Joseph returns to Benjamin the grace that he did not receive from his other brothers.

While Joseph’s brothers fear that they will be cast in prison because of the money that was returned, Joseph prepares a banquet for them because of Benjamin’s presence. It is as if Benjamin has a redeeming effect on the whole situation. When all the brothers are seated according to their ages and respecting the rules of honor, it is Benjamin, the youngest, who is served five times more than all the other brothers (*Gen. 43:33, 34*). And yet, this favoritism does not bother them unlike when Joseph was his father’s favorite many years ago, which led to their terrible actions toward both their half brother and their own father (*Gen. 37:3, 4*).

“By this token of favor to Benjamin he hoped to ascertain if the youngest brother was regarded with the envy and hatred that had been manifested toward himself. Still supposing that Joseph did not understand their language, the brothers freely conversed with one another; thus he had a good opportunity to learn their real feelings. Still he desired to test them further, and before their departure he ordered that his own drinking cup of silver should be concealed in the sack of the youngest.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 228, 229.

The Divination Cup

Read Genesis 44. Why did Joseph put the divination cup in Benjamin's sack and not in another brother's sack?

This story parallels the preceding one. As before, Joseph gives specific instructions; and, once again, he fills the men's sacks with food. This time, however, Joseph adds the strange command to put his precious cup in Benjamin's sack.

The events take, therefore, a different course. While in the preceding trip, the brothers returned to Canaan to take Benjamin with them, now they have to return to Egypt to face Joseph. Whereas in the preceding situation all the brothers found the same thing in their sacks, now Benjamin is singled out as the one who has Joseph's cup. Unexpectedly, Benjamin, who as the guest of honor had access to Joseph's cup, is now suspect and charged with having stolen that precious article. He will go to prison.

That Joseph was using a divination cup did not mean that he believed in its power. Joseph "had never claimed the power of divination, but was willing to have them believe that he could read the secrets of their lives."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 229.

The magic cup was for Joseph a pretext to evoke the supernatural domain, and thus awaken in his brothers' hearts their sense of guilt toward God. This is how Judah interprets Joseph's implied message, because he refers to the iniquity that God has found in them (*Gen. 44:16*). Also, the stealing of that precious cup would justify a severe punishment and thus test the other brothers' thinking.

The intensity of the brothers' emotion and their reaction is significant. They all are united in the same pain, fearing for Benjamin, who will be lost as was Joseph, and like him become a slave in Egypt although he was, like him, innocent. This is why Judah proposes that he be taken as a slave "instead" of Benjamin (*Gen. 44:33*), just as the ram had been sacrificed "instead" of the innocent Isaac (*compare with Gen. 22:13*). Judah presents himself as a sacrifice, a substitution, whose purpose is precisely to cope with that "evil" that would devastate his father (*Gen. 44:34*).

What principle of love, as exemplified in Judah's response, is implied in the process of substitution? How does this kind of love explain the biblical theology of salvation? (See Rom. 5:8.)

“ ‘I Am Joseph Your Brother’ ”

Read Genesis 45. What lessons of love, faith, and hope can be found in this story?

It was at that very moment, when Judah talked about the “ ‘evil’ ” that would fall upon ‘avi,’ “ ‘my father’ ” (*Gen. 44:34*), that Joseph “cried out” (*Gen. 45:1, NKJV*) and then “made himself known” to his brothers. This expression, often used to refer to God’s self-revelation (*Exod. 6:3, Ezek. 20:9*), suggests that it is God who had revealed Himself here, as well. That is, the Lord had shown that His providence reigns, even despite human foibles.

Joseph’s brothers cannot believe what they are hearing and seeing. Thus, Joseph is obliged to repeat, “ ‘I am Joseph your brother’ ” (*Gen. 45:4, NKJV*), and it is only the second time, when they hear the precise words “ ‘whom you sold into Egypt’ ” (*Gen. 45:4, NKJV*), that they believe.

Joseph then declares: “ ‘God sent me’ ” (*Gen. 45:5, NKJV*). This reference to God has a double purpose. It serves not only to reassure his brothers that Joseph does not have hard feelings toward them; but it also is a profound confession of faith, and an expression of hope, because what they did was necessary for the “ ‘great deliverance’ ” and the survival of a “ ‘posterity’ ” (*Gen. 45:7, NKJV*).

Joseph then urges his brothers to go to his father in order to prepare him to come to Egypt. He accompanies his call with specific words concerning the place where they will “ ‘dwell,’ ” that is, Goshen, famous for its rich pasture, “ ‘the best of the land’ ” (*Gen. 45:10, 18, NKJV*). He also takes care of the transportation: carts are provided, which will ultimately convince Jacob that his sons were not lying to him about what they had just experienced (*Gen. 45:27*). Jacob takes this visible demonstration as evidence that Joseph is alive, and this is enough for him to come alive again (*compare with Gen. 37:35, Gen. 44:29*).

Things are now good. Jacob’s 12 sons are alive. Jacob is now called “Israel” (*Gen. 45:28*), and the providence of God has been made manifest in a powerful way.

Yes, Joseph was gracious to his brothers. He could afford to be. How, though, do we learn to be gracious to those whose evil toward us doesn’t turn out as well for us as what Joseph experienced?

Further Thought: Ellen G. White, “Joseph in Egypt,” pp. 213–223; “Joseph and His Brothers,” pp. 224–232, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The three days of confinement were days of bitter sorrow with Jacob’s sons. They reflected upon their past wrong course, especially their cruelty to Joseph. They knew if they were convicted of being spies, and they could not bring evidence to clear themselves, they would all have to die, or become slaves. They doubted whether any effort any one of them might make would cause their father to consent to have Benjamin go from him, after the cruel death, as he thought, Joseph had suffered. They sold Joseph as a slave, and they were fearful that God designed to punish them by suffering them to become slaves. Joseph considers that his father and the families of his brethren, may be suffering for food, and he is convinced that his brethren have repented of their cruel treatment of him, and that they would in no case treat Benjamin as they had treated him.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, book 3, pp. 155, 156.

“Joseph was satisfied. He had proved his brethren, and had seen in them the fruits of true repentance for their sins.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, book 3, p. 165.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, dwell on the question at the end of Thursday’s study. Do you think that Joseph would have been so gracious to his brothers had things not turned out so well for him? Of course, we can’t know for sure, but what indications, if any, in the entire story of Joseph reveal to us the kind of character that Joseph had, which could help explain his graciousness?
- 2 In what ways can we see in Joseph a kind of precursor to Christ and what Christ went through?
- 3 Joseph had tested his brothers. In what similar ways does God test us?
- 4 Even after all those years, the brothers realized their guilt in what they had done to Joseph. What does this teach us about how powerful guilt can be? And though we can be forgiven and accept God’s forgiveness, how do we learn to forgive ourselves, no matter how unworthy we are of that forgiveness?

I Will Go!

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The news about the tragic stabbing death of US volunteer Kirsten Elisabeth Wolcott during a morning jog on the Pacific island of Yap ricocheted across the campus of Southern Adventist University, where she had studied. The university in Collegedale, Tennessee, had sent out many student volunteers over the years, and now students were divided.

“We will not go,” some students said after the 20-year-old junior education major was killed by a drunken man in 2009. “It’s too dangerous.”

Others remembered the words of early Christian church father Tertullian, quoted in *The Great Controversy*: “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed” (page 41).

“We will go!” those students said. “We will honor Kirsten’s faith.”

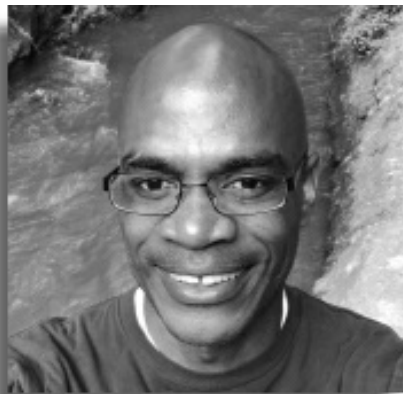
The debate lingered in the mind of Winston Crawford, a 33-year-old theology student, as he walked across the campus on a Sabbath afternoon. He accidentally opened a wrong door and, before he knew it, found himself at an event for student volunteers. He hadn’t known about the event but, because he was there, decided to visit the booths. The woman at one booth spoke about the desperate need for volunteers to teach English in the former Soviet Union. “The program will end if they don’t get anyone,” she said.

Winston’s heart was touched. He hadn’t planned to take off a year, but he thought, *I will honor Kirsten’s faith. I will go.*

He sent away an application and received an invitation to teach in Moscow, Russia. Winston eagerly read about the country as he got his paperwork in order and raised money to buy air tickets. Twelve days before his arrival on April 10, 2010, twin suicide bombers killed 40 people in the Moscow subway. *What did I sign up for?* Winston wondered.

Then he thought about Paul, who had been beaten and left for dead many times. Paul was no coward. He remembered Revelation 21:8, which says the cowardly will not inherit eternal life. He recalled how he had stumbled, seemingly by accident, upon the event with the student volunteers. He remembered Kirsten. *Why would a bomb scare me?* he thought. *God called me to serve. I will go!* Winston went and, a decade later, has no regrets. He grew closer to Christ, and the influence that he had on his students will only be known in eternity. The year changed his life.

This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan, “To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples.” Learn more: IWillGo2020.org.



Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

Israel *in* Egypt



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 46; Rom. 10:12, 13; Genesis 47; Genesis 48; Acts 3:25, 26; Genesis 49; Phil. 2:10; Gen. 49:29–50:21.*

Memory Text: “So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly” (*Genesis 47:27, NKJV*).

Genesis covers the last years of Jacob and Joseph together. We see Jacob (Israel) leave Canaan (*Genesis 46*) in order to settle in Egypt (*Genesis 47*), and there he will die (*Gen. 49:29–50:21*). And yet, even in this Egyptian setting, the prospect of the Promised Land still looms large in the background (*Gen. 50:22–26*).

As soon as Jacob arrives in Egypt, Jacob blesses Pharaoh (*Gen. 47:7–10*), thus fulfilling (partially, of course) the Abrahamic promise to be a blessing to the nations (*Gen. 12:3*). Later, about to die, Jacob blesses Joseph's sons (*Genesis 48*). Jacob also blesses his own sons (*Gen. 49:1–28*) and makes impressive predictions concerning each of them in the context of the future 12 tribes of Israel (*Gen. 49:1–27*).

The fact, however, that Israel “dwells” in exile, in Egypt as strangers, is in tension with the hope of the Promised Land. And though the book of Genesis itself ends with the children of Israel in Egypt, some of the last words of Joseph point to another place: “I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (*Gen. 50:24, NKJV*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 25.

Jacob Goes to Joseph

Read Genesis 46. What is the significance of Jacob's departure from Canaan?

When Jacob leaves his place in Canaan, he is full of hope. The assurance that he will no longer be hungry and the good news that Joseph is alive must have given him the momentum that he needed to leave the Promised Land.

Jacob's departure echoes the experience of Abraham, though in Abraham's case he was heading to the Promised Land. Jacob hears the same promise Abraham heard from God, namely that He will make him "a great nation" (*Gen. 46:3; compare with Gen. 12:2*). God's call here also is reminiscent of God's covenant with Abraham; in both occasions God uses the same reassuring words "do not fear" (*Gen. 46:3, NKJV; compare with Gen. 15:1*), which carry the promise of a glorious future.

The comprehensive listing of the names of the children of Israel who went to Egypt, including his daughters (*Gen. 46:7*), recalls God's promise of fruitfulness to Abraham even when he was still childless. The number "seventy" (including Jacob, Joseph, and his two sons) expresses the idea of totality. It is "all Israel" that goes to Egypt. It also is significant that the number 70 corresponds to the number of nations (*Genesis 10*), suggesting that the destiny of all the nations also is at stake in Jacob's journey.

This truth will become more evident only many years later, after the Cross and the fuller revelation of the plan of salvation, which, of course, was for all humanity, everywhere, and not just for the children of Abraham.

In other words, however interesting the stories are regarding this family, the seed of Abraham, and whatever spiritual lessons we can take from them—these accounts are in the Word of God because they are part of salvation history; they are part of God's plan to bring redemption to as many as possible on this fallen planet.

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved' " (*Rom. 10:12, 13, NKJV*). What does Paul say here that shows the universality of the gospel? More important, what do these words say to us regarding what we as a church should be doing to help spread the gospel?

Jacob Settles in Egypt

It's very interesting how, despite all that Jacob had been told about Joseph's being alive in Egypt, the Lord still gave him "visions of the night" (*Gen. 46:2*) and in them commanded him to leave. Jacob leaves the Land of Promise for, of all places, Egypt—which later becomes associated with the one place that God's people do not want to go (*Deut. 17:16*).

Read Genesis 47. What spiritual truths and principles can we find in this account?

"Joseph took five of his brothers to present to Pharaoh and receive from him the grant of land for their future home. Gratitude to his prime minister would have led the monarch to honor them with appointments to offices of state; but Joseph, true to the worship of Jehovah, sought to save his brothers from the temptations to which they would be exposed at a heathen court; therefore he counseled them, when questioned by the king, to tell him frankly their occupation. The sons of Jacob followed this counsel, being careful also to state that they had come to sojourn in the land, not to become permanent dwellers there, thus reserving the right to depart if they chose. The king assigned them a home, as offered, in 'the best of the land,' the country of Goshen."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 233.

Wisely, too, Pharaoh does not encourage these sojourners to become beggars, living off the largess of their host. He enquires about their "occupation" (*Gen. 47:3, NKJV*) in order that they may adjust better in their new environment. He also is eager to use their expertise, and even suggests that they serve him as "chief herdsmen over [his] livestock" (*Gen. 47:6, NKJV*).

Then, although Jacob, the foreigner, is the inferior, the stranger, he stands before the leader of the land, and, as the text says, "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (*Gen. 47:7*). He, the lowly stranger, is the one who blesses Pharaoh, the ruler of mighty Egypt? Why should that be?

The verb '*amad lifney*, "set . . . before" (*Gen. 47:7*), is normally used in priestly contexts (*Lev. 14:11*). Considering that in ancient Egypt the pharaoh had the status of the highest priest, this means that, in a spiritual sense, Jacob stands higher than the highest priest of Egypt, higher even than Pharaoh himself.

Whatever our station in life, what should it mean to us, in how we treat others, that we are "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (*1 Pet. 2:9*)? What obligations does our faith put on us?

Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons

As Jacob approaches death, he remembers his earlier return to Bethel (*Gen. 35:1–15*), when he received from God the renewed promise of the “everlasting possession” (*Gen. 48:4*) that was given to Abraham (*Gen. 17:8*). The hope of the Promised Land is, therefore, a comforting thought that nurtures his hope as he feels death coming. Jacob turns, then, to Joseph’s two sons, who were born in Egypt, and blesses them, but does so in the context of the future promise regarding his own seed.

Read Genesis 48. Why did Jacob bless Joseph’s two sons here, and not his other grandsons?

Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, are the only grandsons that Jacob blessed. They are thus elevated from the status of grandsons to the status of sons (*Gen. 48:5*). Although Jacob’s blessing implies a preeminence of the second (Ephraim) over the first (Manasseh), Jacob’s blessing essentially concerns Joseph (*Gen. 48:15*).

What we see here is a personal testimony about God’s faithfulness to them in the past and His promise for them in the future. Jacob refers to the God of Abraham and Isaac (*Gen. 48:15*), who had provided food and protection for them. He is the same God who “has redeemed me from all evil” (*Gen. 48:16, NKJV*). Jacob also has in mind “the God of Bethel” (*Gen. 31:13*), with whom he wrestled (*Gen. 32:29*) and who changed his name from Jacob to “Israel” (*Gen. 32:26–29*).

By referring to all these experiences where God turns the evil into good, Jacob expresses his hope that not only will God take care of the present lives of his grandsons, just as He cared for his own life and Joseph’s, but Jacob also thinks of the future, when his descendants will return to Canaan. This hope is clear from his reference to Shechem (*Gen. 48:22*), which not only is a piece of land that he had acquired (*Gen. 33:19*) but also is a place where Joseph’s bones will be buried (*Josh. 24:32*) and where the land will be distributed to the tribes of Israel (*Josh. 24:1*). Even amid all that has happened, Jacob keeps in mind the promises of God, who said that through this family “ ‘all the families of the earth shall be blessed’ ” (*Gen 12:3, NKJV*).

Read Acts 3:25, 26. According to Peter, how was this promise of Genesis 12:3 being fulfilled? How have we, ourselves, received this blessing?

Jacob Blesses His Sons

Read Genesis 49:1–28. What is the spiritual significance of Jacob’s blessing on his sons?

Beyond the prophecies concerning the immediate history of the tribes of Israel, Jacob sees the Messiah and the ultimate hope of salvation. This hope already is indicated in Jacob’s opening words that use the expression “in the last days” (*Gen. 49:1*), a technical expression that refers to the coming of the Messianic King (*Isa. 2:2, Dan. 10:14*).

The text then goes through the future line of each of these men. These are not predestinated fates, as if God willed that each of these would face what they faced; rather, they are expressions of what their characters and the characters of their children would bring about. God’s knowing, for instance, that someone will kill an innocent man is a radically different thing from God’s having willed that the killer do it.

Read Genesis 49:8–12. What prophecy is given here, and why is it important?

Over and above human free will, God does know the future, and He had arranged that it would be through Judah that the Messiah would come. Judah (*Gen. 49:8–12*), who is represented by a lion (*Gen. 49:9*), refers to royalty and praise. Judah will not only produce King David, but also the Shiloh; that is, the One who will bring *shalom*, “peace” (*Isa. 9:6, 7*), to Him “shall be the obedience of the people” (*Gen. 49:10, NKJV*).

The Jews have long seen this as a Messianic prophecy pointing to the coming Messiah, and Christians, too, have seen this text as pointing to Jesus. “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (*Gen. 49:10*), which is, perhaps, a precursor to the New Testament promise “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (*Phil. 2:10*).

As Ellen G. White wrote: “The lion, king of the forest, is a fitting symbol of this tribe, from which came David, and the Son of David, Shiloh, the true ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah,’ to whom all powers shall finally bow and all nations render homage.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 236.

Why should we be rendering homage to Jesus now, even before all nations will do it?

The Hope of the Promised Land

Read Genesis 49:29–50:21. What great themes of hope are found in the conclusion of the book of Genesis?

The conclusion of Genesis is made up of three events that are filled with hope.

First, there is the hope that Israel will return to the Promised Land. Moses, the author of Genesis, describes Jacob's and Joseph's deaths and burials as events pointing to the Promised Land. Immediately after his blessing and prophecy on the "twelve tribes of Israel" (*Gen. 49:28*), Jacob thinks of his death and charges his sons to bury him in Canaan, at the cave of Machpelah, where Sarah was buried (*Gen. 49:29–31*). The narrative describing the funeral procession toward Canaan becomes a precursor to the exodus from Egypt several centuries later.

Second, there is the hope that God will turn evil into good. After Jacob's death and burial, Joseph's brothers are worried about their future. They are afraid that Joseph will now take his revenge. They come to Joseph and prostrate themselves before him, ready to become his servants (*Gen. 50:18*), a scenario that is reminiscent of Joseph's prophetic dreams. Joseph reassures them and tells them to "not be afraid" (*Gen. 50:19, NKJV*), a phrase that refers to the future (*Gen. 15:1*); because what was "meant evil" against him, "God meant . . . for good" (*Gen. 50:20, NKJV*), and turned the course of events toward salvation (*Gen. 50:19–21; compare with Gen. 45:5, 7–9*). That is, even despite so many human failures, God's providence will overrule.

Third, there is the hope that God will save fallen humankind. The story of Joseph's death in this last verse of Genesis is broader than just about his death. Strangely, Joseph does not command to have his bones buried. Instead he points to the time when "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here" (*Gen. 50:25, NKJV*), which they did, many years later, in direct obedience to those words (*see Exod. 13:19*). Ultimately, the hope of the Promised Land, Canaan, is a symbol, a precursor, to the ultimate hope of salvation, of restoration, of a New Jerusalem in a new heaven and a new earth—the ultimate hope for all of us, a hope made certain by the death of Shiloh.

Read Revelation 21:1–4. How do these verses represent the grandest hope that we have? Without this promise, what hope do we have other than death alone as the end of all our problems?

Further Thought: Ellen G. White, “Joseph and His Brothers,” pp. 233–240, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The life of Joseph illustrates the life of Christ. It was envy that moved the brothers of Joseph to sell him as a slave; they hoped to prevent him from becoming greater than themselves. And when he was carried to Egypt, they flattered themselves that they were to be no more troubled with his dreams, that they had removed all possibility of their fulfillment. But their own course was overruled by God to bring about the very event that they designed to hinder. So the Jewish priests and elders were jealous of Christ, fearing that He would attract the attention of the people from them. They put Him to death, to prevent Him from becoming king, but they were thus bringing about this very result.

“Joseph, through his bondage in Egypt, became a savior to his father’s family; yet this fact did not lessen the guilt of his brothers. So the crucifixion of Christ by His enemies made Him the Redeemer of mankind, the Savior of the fallen race, and Ruler over the whole world; but the crime of His murderers was just as heinous as though God’s providential hand had not controlled events for His own glory and the good of man.

“As Joseph was sold to the heathen by his own brothers, so Christ was sold to His bitterest enemies by one of His disciples. Joseph was falsely accused and thrust into prison because of his virtue; so Christ was despised and rejected because His righteous, self-denying life was a rebuke to sin; and though guilty of no wrong, He was condemned upon the testimony of false witnesses. And Joseph’s patience and meekness under injustice and oppression, his ready forgiveness and noble benevolence toward his unnatural brothers, represent the Savior’s uncomplaining endurance of the malice and abuse of wicked men, and His forgiveness, not only of His murderers, but of all who have come to Him confessing their sins and seeking pardon.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 239, 240.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Once Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers feared that now Joseph would get revenge. What does this teach about the guilt that they still harbored? What does Joseph’s reaction teach us about forgiveness for the guilty?
- 2 What other parallels can you find between the lives of Joseph and Jesus?
- 3 Dwell on the fact that although God intimately knows the future, we are still free in the choices we make. How do we reconcile these two ideas?

Praying for 10 Years

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Winston Crawford, a US volunteer teaching English in Moscow, invited one of his Russian students to the Seventh-day Adventist church on Sabbath.

The student, Sasha, did not seem moved by the worship experience. He had been raised in an atheistic family, and he looked downright bored.

Winston felt sad. "I'm not going to try to invite him back," he told himself. "I can see clearly that he didn't enjoy himself." Instead, he started praying. He prayed that the Lord would touch Sasha's heart.

As the months rolled by, Winston and Sasha struck up a friendship. During vacation, Sasha invited him to travel to the Karelia region near Finland to meet his parents and younger brother. Winston kept praying.

After completing his year of volunteer service, Winston returned to the United States but remained in contact with Sasha. When Sasha visited the United States after several years, the two spent time together in Chicago.

Winston kept praying. More than 10 years passed.

One day, Sasha sent a message via WhatsApp. "I want to read the Bible," he wrote. "Could you help me to understand it?" Winston was delighted. "Sure!" he texted back. They agreed to meet once a week.

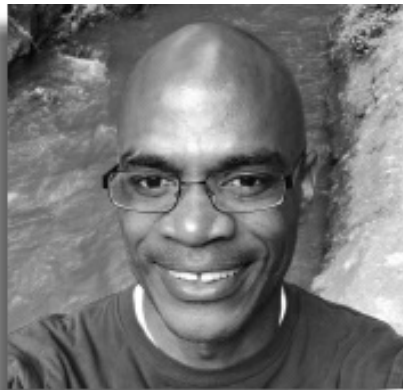
At their first meeting, Sasha was fascinated as they read Genesis 1. He was particularly impressed that God gave a vegetarian diet in Genesis 1:29, which says, "And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food' " (NKJV). Sasha was a vegetarian, and he had thought that following a plant-based diet was simply good practice.

"I had no idea that this is from the Bible!" he said.

At the end of the meeting, he expressed awe. "I have read Pushkin and Dostoevsky, but it seems like something different is happening when I read the Bible," he said. "It's like the words are coming up off the page to me."

Winston was elated. He felt certain that the Holy Spirit was elevating His Word to reach Sasha's heart. After three weeks of Bible study, Sasha asked whether they could increase their meetings to twice a week. Winston kept praying. "It's inspiring for me that after more than 10 years he wants to read the Bible—and not only that, but I get to study the Bible with him," Winston said in an interview. "I know this is God. I know it completely is God."

This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, "To disciple individuals and families into spirit-filled lives." Read more: IWillGo2020.org.



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2022 Bible Study Guide for the Third Quarter

This quarter's study, "In the Crucible With Christ," by Gavin Anthony, explores why we as Christians, committed to Christ, experience suffering. Christ was no stranger to suffering. Our pain, suffering, and loss do not mean that God has abandoned us. Our study will show that God gives us meaning in these difficult times, and that, above all, we can trust Him. "Trials are essential in order that we may be brought close to our heavenly Father, in submission to His will, that we may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. . . . The Lord brings His children over the same ground again and again, increasing the pressure until perfect humility fills the mind, and the character is transformed; then they are victorious over self, and in harmony with Christ and the Spirit of heaven. The purification of God's people cannot be accomplished without suffering."—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 92.

Lesson 1—The Shepherd's Crucible

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **A Guide for the Journey: The Shepherd** (*Ps. 23:1*)

MONDAY: **Locations on the Journey** (*Ps. 23:3, NRSV*)

TUESDAY: **Unexpected Detour 1: The Valley** (*Ps. 23:4, NKJV*)

WEDNESDAY: **Unexpected Detour 2: The Surrounded Table** (*Ps. 23:5*)

THURSDAY: **A Certain Promise for the Journey** (*Ps. 23:6, NKJV*)

Memory Text—*Psalms 23:3*

Sabbath Gem: There are times when we have been treated unfairly, betrayed, or led into the valley of death as described in Psalm 23. But God promises that He will restore us and use these painful experiences to train us in righteousness.

Lesson 2—The Crucibles That Come

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Surprises** (*1 Pet. 4:12, NIV*)

MONDAY: **Crucibles of Satan** (*1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV*)

TUESDAY: **Crucibles of Sin** (*Rom. 1:8, NKJV*)

WEDNESDAY: **Crucibles of Purification** (*Jer. 9:7, NKJV*)

THURSDAY: **Crucibles of Maturity** (*2 Cor. 12:7, NKJV*)

Memory Text—*1 Peter 4:12, 13, NIV*

Sabbath Gem: God allows us to experience difficult circumstances to change, develop, and grow our characters. At times these tests make us feel like we are in a boiling crucible in a lab, but we are not the victims of a cruel divine experiment. If we recognize how God works in our lives, we can understand what our response should be.

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; website: www.christianrecord.org.