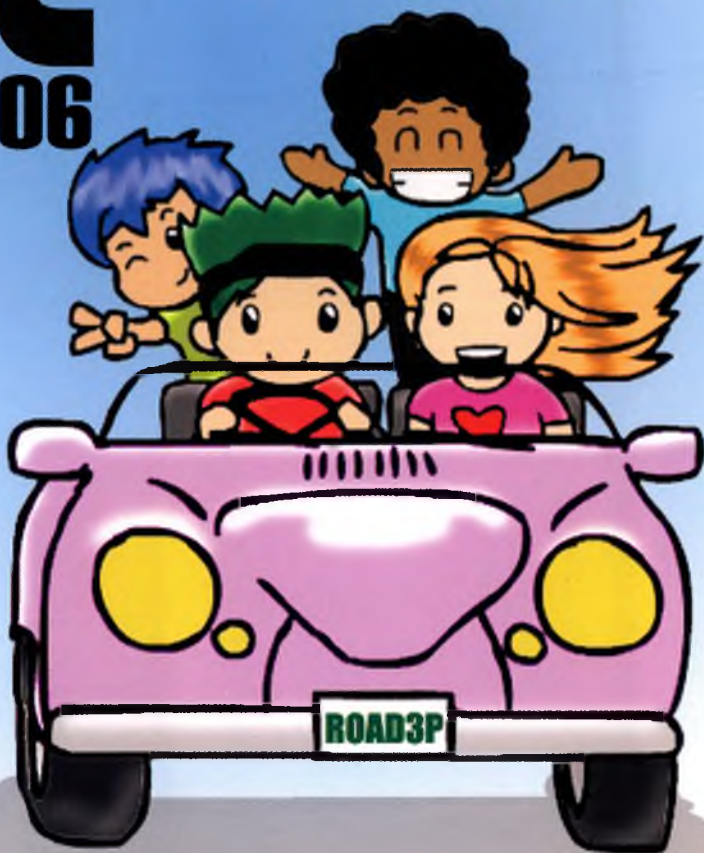


OCTOBER–DECEMBER

Q
2006

GENESIS: *Creation and Redemption*



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



<http://cq.adventist.org>

Genesis: Creation and Redemption



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This Quarter's Illustrator



Vincent Julius Biscaro Matias is currently earning his degree in Business Administration at the University of the Philippines Diliman. Illustrated lesson quarterlies for kids along with encouragement from his parents, siblings, and friends inspired him to create artworks of his own. Vincent is often tapped to do LCD-projected illustrations for Sabbath School programs in Pasay (Philippines) Adventist Church.

Getting the most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of CQ is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
 - "Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
 - "Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
 - "Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

Foundations



“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3, NKJV).

The Importance of Foundations

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 111:10

“Reverence for the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom. The rewards of wisdom come to all who obey him” (Ps. 111:10, NLT).

Some years ago I heard an interesting old story about the national theater in Moscow. This is a well-known building for many Russians as well as for many tourists all over the world. During one of the tourist visits, someone noticed that a wall had cracks. The wall was repaired and painted, and it was assumed that everything was OK. But that wasn't the case.

As time passed, cracks began to appear in almost all the walls, and the people responsible for the maintenance of the theater became more and more worried about its condition. It seemed that one of the greatest symbols of the city was falling apart, and nobody knew why.

The city council gathered and discussed what could be done to save the theater. Someone made the suggestion to examine the foundation of the building. All

members of the council agreed and soon architects went down to see whether the solution to the problem could be found there. The concrete foundations looked just like any other. When the specialists had almost agreed that the answer was

**It is vital for our eternal
destiny to stand on solid
ground.**

not hidden there, one of them noticed something unusual. Many years before, when the old solid concrete groundwork was molded, the contractors had placed large wooden blocks under the concrete foundations to strengthen the building. Unfortunately the blocks that they had considered to be strong and long-lasting slowly began to rot away. This was causing the slow destruction of the theater. When they found out what the problem was, they immediately set about to replace the old wooden blocks with strong stones and concrete. And so the old theater was saved for posterity.

Foundations play an incredibly important role in any building. In the same way, they are an essential part of our spiritual life and determine how strong we are. In today's postmodern society, in which values and basic principles are considered as something relative, it is vital for our eternal destiny to stand on solid ground in order to lead a successful Christian life. This week's lesson will help us to understand better the foundations that have their roots in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. May God guide us as we explore this topic.

Much More Than a Book of Old Stories

LOGOS

Matt. 19:3–8; Luke 17:26–30; Acts 7:1–15; Rom. 1:17; 4:3; 5:14; Heb. 11:1–22

Matthew 19:4–6

The wonderful story of the human race began with an awesome love relationship. Adam and Eve created as partners, as a family. Adam and Eve were not to have been self-oriented, concentrated on his or her own profit. Moreover, the family was to be a symbol of unity as a foundation: unity with God, through God, and in God—and unity with each other. This relationship of unity was to be the foundation of a happy life. “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen. 1:31, NKJV). Everything God created was marked by His love. Everything was very good. With this wonderful story of love, God established the beginning of the world.

You are also a valuable creation of God. You are a unique masterpiece of His hands. You may not have experienced real and unconditional love in your family, and may not believe that someone could really love you. To your acquaintances, you're

**You are also a valuable
creation of God.**

an outsider; in the church, nothing remarkable; in school, just a number. If such thoughts keep running through your mind, don't forget that God knows you; He sees your hidden tears; He has compassion for you. He

would never leave you alone. God has a wonderful plan for your life. He wants you to be happy. His love is the foundation of your life.

Luke 17:26–30

The development of humanity was not as wonderful as its beginning. Selfishness and hate grew where unity and love had flourished. Sin, not only as an action but also as a way of thinking and attitude of life, shook the foundation of creation. The stories of Noah and Lot illustrate the broken relationship between God and humanity on one hand, and within humanity on the other.

You may wonder what is so bad about eating, drinking, and marrying (Luke 17:27). Is it not God's will for us to have a happy life? Yes, of course. He wants the best for us. The problem is not in God but in us. Sometimes we misuse His blessings when we concentrate more on His gifts than on Him. We use Him shamelessly. The foundation of our relationship to Him is not mutual love anymore. It is based on one-sided, selfish wishes and interests. We adopt this I-oriented life philosophy in our

interpersonal relationships. We spread hate, envy, and jealousy around us. In this way we destroy the foundation of life that God has given us.

Hebrews 11:4–22; Romans 1:17

Because of sin, humanity could not enter into direct contact with God anymore. Seeing God was replaced by believing in God. This substantial change in the God-man relationship represented an important challenge. Faith was not a kind of holy ritual but an existential decision for life that everyone has to make. For Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph to believe in the living God was not a family tradition but a personal experience. The foundation of faith cannot be inherited. God has no grandchildren, He has only daughters and sons. The people described in Hebrews 11 were people just like us, with weaknesses and problems, fears and worries. What made them special was their decision to have faith and confidence in God and to solve every issue in their life according to that decision.

You may have been born into a Christian family. Going to church, worship, Sabbath School, may have become a routine for you. You may be a Christian because your parents are Christians. You may go to church merely because your friends are there. It is good to have Christian friends and parents who believe in God. But despite your exemplary religious life, you may still feel an emptiness because you haven't really experienced God in your life. You have heard a lot about Him, but you lack a personal encounter with Him. The religious knowledge and rituals cannot substitute for a personal experience. Your Christianity has a safe foundation only if it leads to a personal faith relationship with God.

Romans 5:14, 15

Genesis is not merely a book of old stories. It has an important spiritual and theological meaning for Christians through all ages. Paul uses Adam and Christ as models (prototypes) of two totally different ways of thinking and behavior.

The book Genesis tells us more than stories about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and their righteous lives. Behind the stories God is willing to reveal to us a deeper truth: the gospel of Jesus Christ as a personal Savior. The gospel of Genesis goes beyond the life experiences of people who loved God. It points to the coming Savior—Jesus Christ, in whom they believed and hoped. Through the eyes of faith they saw the invisible and oriented their lives toward Him.

You are at the beginning of a journey full of discoveries through the book of Genesis. May this book become your book and its stories your own stories. It should help you get to know Jesus Christ personally as your Friend, life Guide, and Savior. May you find in Him optimism and hope for your life. He is the only sure foundation in this unsure world.

A Creation of Wisdom and Love

TESTIMONY

Gen. 2:8

Probably because God wanted to express Himself better to the universe He gave life to such a unique creature as man. "Man is very dear to God, because he was formed in His own image. This fact should impress us with the importance of teaching by precept and example the sin of defiling, by the indulgence of appetite, or by any other sinful practice, the body which is designed to represent God to the world."¹

There were two institutions that, after the Fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise: marriage and Sabbath rest.

"When the Lord presented Eve to Adam, angels of God were witnesses to the ceremony."² "The Sabbath was committed to Adam. Its observance was to be an act of grateful acknowledgment, on the part of all who should dwell upon the earth, that God was their creator and their rightful sovereign; that they were the work of His

hands, and the subjects of His authority."³ Adam and Eve's home was not a house or a flat but a garden.

"In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the

**"In the surroundings of the
holy pair was a lesson for all
time."**

indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works."⁴

God wants us to be active. "All the heavenly beings are in constant activity."⁵ "And man, his mind and body created in God's similitude, must be active in order to fill his appointed place. He is not to be idle. Idleness is sin."⁶

1. *Lift Him Up*, p. 48.

2. *The Truth About Angels*, p. 48.

3. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 32.

4. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 49.

5. *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 75.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 76.

A Creation in Progress

EVIDENCE

John 5:17; Col. 1:14-17

The most significant inventions and scientific discoveries have appeared in the last two centuries. Try to imagine our daily life without radio transmissions. From the first experiments in 1888 proving the existence of the electromagnetic waves, the "age of communications" has been only 118 years. Or consider this: In 1989 in CERN¹ Tim Berners-Lee invented the first World Wide Web.² After only 17 years life is unthinkable without the three omnipotent letters "www."

Creativity is God's attribute. He presents Himself as the Creator of the universe. "He made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south" (Job 9:9, NKJV). Can you ever imagine how mighty God is to be able to deal with the countless planets, stars, and galaxies? We are created in His image, and perhaps creativity is a part of His image embedded in us (Gen. 2:26). We are creators, not to the degree that He is, but we are His children. We are at least "a little bit" like Him. And this "little" means a lot!

The four living creatures described in Revelation 4:6-9 repeat continually the same phrase: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." I know that God is worthy of praise, but I confess I didn't want to praise Him until I realized something: Living creatures are the most blessed and privileged ones in the universe. They are the closest to the Creator. They are witnesses of the creation that comes from God's hand. Imagine looking at a brand-new galaxy full of beautiful stars, surrounded with inhabited planetary systems. They can never be bored. They are the most informed, the most educated, and (maybe because of this) the most excited voices of praise in the universe. There is nothing else they want to say about the wonderful Creator God than "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

Why don't we join them?

**Knowledge has increased
at an unbelievable pace.**

1. European Organization for Nuclear Research

2. <<http://www.cern.ch>>

HOW-TO

Matt. 25:32–46; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 3:16

Genesis talks about the first things. About origins. And, yes, I know I'm stating the obvious.

There is an intriguing phrase theologians use: *Creation ex nihilo*. It refers to a way that God reveals His omnipotence, His staggering power to create things. And it roughly means: "To make something out of nothing." That's what happened at the very beginning. Let's say that all shapes and colors were created from the inexplicable nothingness.

And then we see the process repeated, but backwards. Here comes the Fall. In our spiritual world we humans traded the ultimate light of God's presence for a single piece of fruit and plunged back into the darkness that was upon the face of the deep. We became close to nothing. The biggest question of all since then is: How may we be restored? And the answer is: I don't know. There are no clear "How to's."

I don't believe that there could possibly exist a list of ten steps (humanly speaking) that lead us to our origins—when these very origins are long lost. There couldn't be some five "How to's" through which we may rebuild our foundations when they have been long demolished. Other-

**We see the process
repeated, but backwards.**

wise it would have been so easy. So simple.

Yet restoration is as simple as the first promise ever given to humanity: the promise of a Savior. And there are a few helpful steps:

1. Be a friend of God (John 17:3). Read about Him. Pray to Him.
2. Be a friend to the people around you (Matt. 25:32–46). Help them whenever you can. Tell them about Jesus.
3. Be a friend to yourself (1 Cor. 3:16). Don't bruise your body and mind. Remember to give some rest to yourself each Sabbath.

We may do all of this only through God's grace. Freedom of choice was among the first things given to the human race. So it's all up to you. You have to discover by yourself and for yourself. The Bible and Genesis will guide you along all the way.

REACT

What are the foundations on which I build my own life?

Origins Are Crucial to Our Identity

Thursday
October 5

OPINION

Acts 17:24-28

The egg of an eagle hatched, among chicken eggs. The eagle grew up thinking that it was a chicken. It did everything that its second mother (the hen) and the other chickens did, being unaware of its true origins and purpose on earth.

Eagles inhabit the high mountains and are very good flyers. Chickens cannot fly and spend the day pecking the ground for worms and insects.

Similarly, with us humans, our character building and identity owe a lot to what we believe our origins to be. We need to know who our parents and grandparents are to know who we truly are. But even more important is to know who created us. Answering the question "What are the origins of the earth and humankind?" is crucial to our way of thinking and living in this world.

The idea of autogenesis, that life can come into being from nonliving materials, occurred as early as the sixth century B.C. with the first Greek philosophers—the Presocratics. The "Investigators of Nature," as they were called, rejected the mythological explanation of the world and created their own explanation: From water, air, fire, and earth, all things originated and return to them again by a never-resting process of transformation.

**Let's give Him our canvas
and allow Him to paint.**

For the majority of people nowadays the creation of the world as explained in Genesis seems mere mythology. People prefer to believe that they are here only because of pure chance, a result of a physical reaction. How different would everything be if people acknowledged the truth as revealed in Genesis!

We have a heavenly Father who wanted to share His goodness and love with all His creation and who designed a wonderful world for them (Ps. 104:24)! If that poor eagle from the story knew its origins, it would have behaved in a different way. In the same way, if every person knew his/her true origin people would have a totally different attitude and identity (Eph. 2:10).

I've personally chosen to believe that God created us. He knows each of us by name, and He will never stop loving us. If we will allow Him to finish His work, I'm certain we will like the end result! Let's give Him our canvas and allow Him to paint. Let's follow His plan and allow our life to become His work of art.

Antonia Aytova, Sofia, Bulgaria

Standing on What?

EXPLORATION

Pss. 40:2; 118:22; 127:1; Col. 1:16, 17

The foundation of a building is not the most beautiful, eye-catching part. But it is the most important. Without a sound foundation, a building is vulnerable to natural and artificial elements that could easily destroy the most acclaimed structure. So it is with our spiritual life. For many of us, it is easy to profess Christianity while our foundation rests on shifting sand. Christ alone is the foundation for the Christian. His Word grounds us to His love and shows us how to live for Him in a secular society that does not recognize Him. As the saying goes, "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything."

CONSIDER

- Sending an email to five friends, asking them to answer the following questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going? Analyze and discuss their answers in light of this week's lesson.
- Evaluating the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and ranking them in order of importance to you <<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>>.
- Singing hymn #522, "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less." Meditate on its words, and journal your response.
- Drafting a visual statement of belief. Draw or use magazine cutouts to express the things that define you.
- Interviewing people where you work with the question: Are you created or did you evolve?
- Growing plants from seeds. Follow the instructions, and chronicle their growth. Read Colossians 1:16, 17. Think about what part God plays in the creation of all things.
- Listing things you can do to enjoy a closer relationship with Christ. Find a friend to help you stay on track as you prayerfully seek to know your Maker.

CONNECT

Genesis 1; Colossians 1:16–23.

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 2.

Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . (2005 edition), General Conference Ministerial Department.

"In the Beginning . . ."



"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:6, 9, NKJV).

Life in Darkness

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 1:1

Lucas and Diana were very excited. After all, they had been waiting for that answer for four long months . . .

"So, doctor?" Lucas asked.

"Well, it seems we have a girl," the doctor answered.

A girl! They couldn't believe it. It was too good to be true! They couldn't understand how the doctor could see a little girl on that black screen, but that didn't matter. All that mattered was that they had a girl.

It was exactly like that in the beginning of our world. It was all dark and without form. The Spirit of God "moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2, KJV). But God didn't see only an empty planet. He saw more than that.

God saw huge trees, with their beautiful green leaves; He saw colorful butterflies, with their graceful and gentle flight; He saw calm lakes. He saw the forests, the flowers, the animals. Just like that doctor, in the middle of darkness, He saw life. He saw you and me, and He loved us.

**We have many evidences
that the Bible is correct.**

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (verse 1, NKJV). What a power! We Christians believe in that. Or at least we should. However, there are still

many people—Christians and non-Christians—who don't believe in Creation the way it is described in the book of Genesis. They'd rather believe in evolution.

I respect the evolutionists' right to their own opinions, but I can't understand them. How do they explain the meaning of life? Where did we come from? Where are we going? Who are we? How do they explain feelings such as faith, hope, and love? Why did life come about on this planet? Was there a previous plan? Who would be behind all that? These are questions that we all ask ourselves throughout life, and evolutionists simply cannot answer them.

Many evolutionists justify their position saying that the Bible is a farce. Well, centuries ago, people thought the earth was flat. Many years later, they found out that it was actually round. And that was ratified when scientists visited space for the first time. But the Bible had already said in Isaiah that "It is He who sits above the circle of the earth" (Isa. 40:22, NKJV).

We have many evidences that the Bible is correct, that we can rely on what it says. But God doesn't want us to believe just because of the evidence. He wants us to have faith. During this week and for the rest of our lives, may we see in everything that surrounds us the fingerprints of this wonderful Creator, who placed us on this world not by chance, but by love.

From the Hands of the Creator

EVIDENCE

Gen. 1:27

One day an atheist asked a Christian, "Does God exist?"

The Christian replied: "Yes, surely."

"But how can you be so sure if you cannot see Him or touch Him?" retorted the atheist.

"Does love exist?" asked the Christian.

"Yes."

"And how do you know it exists?"

"Because I can feel it," answered the atheist.

"Well, the same way you are so sure love exists, even though you cannot see it or touch it, I can be convinced that God exists, because, just like love, I can feel Him," concluded the Christian.

We cannot see or touch the Lord, but we are assured that He exists because the great evidences of creation bring us to believe in Him. It is impossible to ignore the perfection of nature, and even of our own body, which functions in such an extraordinary synchrony. David, the psalmist, has already mentioned this: "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; . . . Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed" (Ps. 139:14, 16, NKJV).

**We cannot see or touch the
Lord, but we are assured
that He exists.**

After having created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the animals with the command of His voice alone, the Creator reserved a special moment to create something with His own hands. After modeling a perfect figure out of mud, He breathed into its nostrils the breath of life. God did not just create "something else." He molded humankind after His own image and resemblance. The love for the human He had just formed was so great that God gave him the freedom of choice, so that he could choose the path to follow in his life. Unfortunately, his choice was not a wise one. The result we already know very well. But the love of our Creator was not exhausted. Even though it saddened His heart to see what He had created sunk in darkness, God sent His Son Jesus, who of His own free will left heaven to come to die for us. The book of Genesis shows not only God's love in creating us but also the eternal extension of His mercy, to the point of sacrificing His only Son on behalf of His human creatures. How could we not believe that we really are children of this wonderful God?

In the Beginning ... God

LOGOS

Genesis 1

In what do you prefer to believe: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1, NKJV) or that a group of fish had a peculiar anatomy that would enable them to develop legs and become walking creatures that later assumed human form? Or maybe in any other evolutionist theory that we could list here?

This duality of ideas may make you question the origin of humankind and the origin of the planet and of everything in it. On one hand, the Bible describes the creation by an eternal God who in a specific period of eternity planned a new world and in a week created it by His own Word. On the other hand, scientists assert with diverse evolutionary ideas several explanations for the appearance of the earth and of humankind with the passing of millions and billions of years.

Those ideas are clearly contradictory. If you believe in Creation, you automatically do not believe in evolution, and vice versa. If one is true, the other is a lie.

Let's say, however, that we prefer to accept the idea of Creation. What is going

What is going to make us believe that God is really the Originator of this universe?

to make us believe that God is really the Originator of this planet and of the entire universe? We need to believe in the Bible and in a supernatural God, or else, how could we accept the fact that Jesus walked on water, or parted the sea in two to

make a passage for the people of Israel? It is wonderful to believe that in a week of six days, so short for us, God created our entire world!

We cannot but think of the beginning of everything. For everything there is a first cause, an initial moment. "In the beginning, not of eternity, but of the creation of the world . . . This point indicates the first interruption in the past eternity." This makes us think that God interrupted eternity to initiate a new creation. During six days He dedicated special attention to create a world in which the inhabitants would bear His image and resemblance.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (verse 1, NKJV). The word *created*, from the Hebrew *bara*, means "to make." God made the heavens and the earth. "The earth [however] was without form" (verse 2, NKJV). "In other words, the original creation remained temporarily without form and empty, a condition that was soon changed."² As we analyze the text, we come to think that, in a first moment, God created that which today we call earth. How good it is to know that God had already made plans to create us well before the foundation of the world!

After this beginning, five days went by, and finally on the sixth day, humankind was created in the image and resemblance of the Creator.

“Humans in all their being—body and soul—adequately and faithfully represent God, possess life originated in Him and, consequently, a potential intimacy with Him, serving on earth as His administrators. His image is passed along to each human being, giving dignity to each person.”³

To accept the existence of a personal God is a decision that we should make using our hearts as well as our minds, because the mind by itself is not able to find a reason. “Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; he calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing” (Isa. 40:26, NKJV).

“The Bible is not limited in understanding. However our minds are limited in understanding. Science merely uncovers new panoramas of increasing complexity, all adorned with God’s fingerprints. True science attests to the existence of a Superhuman Infinite Mind, that of a Master Designer.”⁴

I was reading the book *Eles Criam em Deus (They Believed in God)* by Rodrigo P. Silva, that presents men and women who made a difference in the scientific world, and their belief in God. A portion of the book really caught my attention:

“Everything happened when Pascal and his friends were one day discussing their opinions at a square in the city of Paris. Those men were free thinkers and did not accept the existence of God. Pascal was conscious of that and knew also that they appreciated very much a game of bets. So he affirmed: ‘I bet you that, mathematically speaking, to believe in God is more lucrative than disbelieving Him.’

“‘How is that?’ asked one of his colleagues. ‘It is simple,’ answered Pascal. ‘You are able, while an atheist, to have everything that a believer has: family, health, culture, principles, etc. While an atheist, you are able to still argue that nobody is able to prove to you, without questioning, that God exists. So, if you and a believer die, it is possible to say that the life of you both ended up in a tie. Everything one had, the other also had. Thus, if you are correct in your atheism, the tie continues, and both will have the same end. However, if the believer is correct, then you will be untied, for it will not be possible for both of you to enjoy the same luck as you face the judgment of God.’

“‘Therefore,’” Pascal concludes, “‘if I bet in God and God exists, my gain is infinite.

“‘If I bet in God and God does not exist—I have not lost anything.

“‘If I bet against God and God does not exist—I have neither lost or gained.

“‘If I bet against God and God exists—then my loss will be infinite.’”

1. *The Annotated Bible of Charles Caldwell Ryrie.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Study Bible of Geneva.*

4. <<http://www.earthharvest.org>>.

We Are Unique in the Universe

TESTIMONY

Gen. 1:27

"The divine mind and hand have preserved through the ages the record of creation in its purity. It is the word of God alone that gives to us an authentic account of the creation of our world."¹

"The Father and the Son engaged in the mighty, wondrous work they had contemplated—of creating the world. The earth came forth from the hand of the Creator exceedingly beautiful. There were mountains and hills and plains; and interspersed among them were rivers and bodies of water. The earth was not one extensive plain, but the monotony of the scenery was broken by hills and mountains, not high and ragged as they now are, but regular and beautiful in shape. The bare, high rocks were never seen upon them, but lay beneath the surface, answering as bones to the earth. The waters were regularly dispersed. The hills, mountains, and very beautiful plains were adorned with plants and flowers and tall, majestic trees of every description, which were many times larger and much more

**"God created man a
superior being."**

beautiful than trees now are. The air was pure and healthful, and the earth seemed like a noble palace. Angels beheld and rejoiced at the wonderful and beautiful works of God."²

"After the earth was created, and the beasts upon it, the Father and Son carried out their purpose, which was designed before the fall of Satan, to make man in their own image. They had wrought together in the creation of the earth and every living thing upon it. And now God said to His Son, 'Let us make man in our image.' As Adam came forth from the hand of his Creator he was of noble height and of beautiful symmetry. He was more than twice as tall as men now living upon the earth, and was well proportioned.

"God created man a superior being; he alone is formed in the image of God and is capable of partaking of the divine nature, of co-operating with his Creator and executing His plans; and he alone is found at war with God's purposes."³

1. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, p. 13.

2. *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 20, 21.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 311.

The Father's Vision

HOW-TO

John 1:10

Jim Graham, an 11-year-old English boy, lived in China when World War II began. He was separated from his parents and taken to a Japanese concentration camp. Tragically separated from a life full of privileges, the young boy had to face the hardships of war. He bravely did everything to survive. Meeting his family again was what he always kept in mind. After facing hardships for so long, completely hopeless, the boy admitted: "I no longer remembered how my parents looked!" This touching story is presented in the movie *Empire of the Sun* (1987), based on the book of J. G. Ballard.

We live in an Empire-of-the-Sun world, in war time. We are separated from the Father—a situation described in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. As lost children, humankind has lost sight of God and His divine paternity. We live a meaningless life, marked by pain. In order not to forget the image of the Creator, we must recognize and accept the plan of salvation.

The world blurs our sight. Human philosophies, skeptical theories, materialism, the quest for wealth—these are just a few of the tricks that take us away from the Word. There are plenty of them, transforming the world into a minefield. To resist, we must study the Bible, know the strategies of the enemy, put on the whole armor of God, and remember, above all, that the strength to succeed comes from the Father.

The world blurs our sight.

Yet unlike Jim's parents, our heavenly Father has never separated from us. The utmost expression of His divine care for us is Jesus, who has come to earth just to save His children—the greatest love story of all time, described in the Bible. But salvation also depends on each of us. Accept the ransom offered by Jesus, the Living Word. "He is a shield to all who trust in Him" (Ps. 18:30, NKJV).

Open your eyes. The Father will be back. His return is at hand. The time of distress will give room to a time of peace. At the moment the war is intense. The bombs are each time closer and more powerful. The world has come to a point when most deny their own Creator. Therefore, proclaim the divine call, making it as loud as you can: "'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water'" (Rev. 14:7, NKJV). Let us all worship our Creator.

Where Did All This Come From?

OPINION

Ps. 19:1

An analogy shows that the evolutionist model is far from being the most logical way of explaining the origin of life: Let's suppose we are walking through the sand dunes of a shore, right after a short rain. At a certain point in our walk, we come to a message recently written in the wet sand: "God loves you." Nobody, in their right senses, would say that such a phrase in the sand originated by chance. For the evolutionist, however, the incredible and complex chemistry message of the genetic code, for example, came about by chance! The particles of sand do not contain, in themselves, any message. But they can store a message that is written upon them by someone who has the ability to write.

Likewise, the amino acids of the nucleic acid do not contain, in themselves, any message. But they are the "alphabet" that allows the storage of an almost infinitely complex message in chemistry that regulates all the vital processes that occur in the human body. The only logical conclusion possible is that this message, in the form of a chemistry code, was written by an intelligent superior Being, external to the matter and transcending the material.

Creationism—which advocates the creation of the universe by God—is beyond the limits of natural science, and for that reason, many times it is completely rejected by evolutionists as unscientific. Nonetheless, these are the same evolutionists who, in order to maintain their materialistic thought and philosophy, deny the very science that contradicts what is clearly demonstrated as a scientific impossibility, that is, the origin of a code without a codifier.

Therefore, whether we look through a field glass or a microscope, we can see the fingerprints of the Creator. All we need is to open wide our eyes and ask: "Where did all this come from?"

REACT

1. What does it mean that only you (human being) are formed in the image of God? What does it say about how God sees you?
2. Which characteristics do you see in yourself that show you were formed in His image?
3. How are some of these characteristics distorted by sin?
4. How do you personally respond to the theory of intelligent design?

Michelson Borges, Tatui, Brazil

Declare the Glory of God

EXPLORATION

Ps. 19:1; 139:14

CONCLUDE

Creationism rests on the belief that God is Creator. Intelligent design evidences His creative touch and showcases His attention to detail. Consider the intricacies of the human body. With the psalmist we can proclaim, "I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works" (Ps. 139:14, NASB). Contemplate the vastness of the universe and the wonders therein. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1, NKJV). How awesome is that!

CONSIDER

- Analyzing the image you will find at <<http://hubblesite.org/newscenter/newsdesk/archive/releases/1996/01/text/>>. This photo shows a small portion of the night sky about the size of the eye on the face of a United States dime held at arm's length. In this image, we can see more than 1,500 galaxies. The enormity of the universe boggles the mind.
- Thinking about God's image in us. Genesis 1:27 states that God created humans in His own image and that He created male and female people. Based on biblical examples, think of some traits usually associated with females that are part of God's character.
- Discovering some fascinating facts about the human body, such as 100,000 heartbeats a day, 60,000 miles of blood vessels, 10 million blinks a year, etc.
- Writing a poem as if you were a space traveler looking back at planet Earth in the view seen in the image noted above.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 2.

George Javor, *Evidences for Creation*; Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture*.

The Early Earth



“Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them,
were finished” (Gen. 2:1, NKJV).

Back to the Past

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 104:24

If the earth were as small as the moon, the power of gravity would be too weak to retain sufficient atmosphere for human needs; but if it were as large as Jupiter, Saturn, or Uranus, extreme gravitation would make human movement almost impossible! If we were as near to the sun as Venus, the heat would be unbearable; if we were as far away as Mars, we would experience snow and ice every night even in the warmest regions. If the oceans were only half their present dimensions, we would receive only one-fourth the rainfall we do now; if they were one-eighth larger, our annual precipitation would increase fourfold, and this earth would become a vast, uninhabitable swamp!

Water solidifies at 32 degrees above zero Fahrenheit. It would be disastrous if the oceans were subject to that law, for then, the amount of thawing in the polar regions would not balance out, and ice would accumulate throughout the centuries. To prevent such a catastrophe, the Lord put salt in the sea to alter its freezing point.*

Nature was created perfectly—not just out of God's whims or caprices. There's a far better plan. When all was complete—when the land was ready to be inhabited, and the day of rest was blessed, God created His masterpiece: humankind, and placed them in the most beautiful part of earth, the Garden of Eden. He gave them an authority over all the great riches around him, along with a warning. And that's not all! God understands that human happiness could not be fulfilled merely by supplying our physical necessities.

It is good to know that we are doing just fine today: food to eat, homes to live in, clothes to wear, jobs to do. As Christians, however, we are additionally thankful for the very privilege that we are alive, and we have a hope that someday we will live eternally with our God.

When I was in my fifth year in college, I was having a hard time solving a problem in my engineering class. When my professor assessed my work, he said, "You know where your problem is? You're forgetting the basics. Return to your algebra."

Algebra had been my very first math class in my first year of college! But when I did what he told me, the problem seemed to be so easy.

Revisiting the basics seems so inappropriate nowadays, but it gives us a sense of completion, a solid direction. So the next time you're getting weary with this life and feel as if there's nowhere to go, read Genesis 2, enter your time machine, begin your journey to the past, and relive the great history of early earth.

Revisiting the basics seems so inappropriate nowadays.

*Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, pp. 350, 351.

LOGOS

Genesis 2

The Last Creation and Gift (Gen. 2:1, 3)

On the seventh day God created the Sabbath—or did He? Did God create the Sabbath just for Eden, or did He just share it with earth? I wonder if the Trinity and the angels always worshiped and rested on the Sabbath back through eternity? How much significance does it give the Sabbath today that it was celebrated in Eden? In chapter 2 it doesn't say anything about Adam and Eve celebrating the Sabbath. How do you know it was for them too?

Creation's Recipe (Gen. 2:4–7)

Moses now returns to Creation week to spotlight the part of Creation that was in God's image: man and woman. In verse 4 the Lord is called Jehovah or Yahweh for the first time. This name refers to God as the One who was, is, and ever shall be. In verse 7 the Lord shares the

**That first Friday must have
seemed like a long day!**

recipe for Adam, the first human. Several doctrines hinge on this recipe. It says that a person is the sum of the "dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7, KJV) plus the "breath of life" (verse 7, KJV). It doesn't say anything about an immortal soul. With no immortal soul, at death the breath returns to God (Pss. 104:29; 146:4) and the body returns to dust (Gen. 3:19; Eccles. 3:20). With no immortal soul there is no need for an eternal burning hell. It is good news that only God is immortal (1 Tim. 6:16) and that He gives us immortality as a gift at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:54)!

The Greatest Camping Place (Gen. 2:8–14)

The Lord could have made any kind of dwelling for Adam and Eve, yet He chose to make them campers: They lived outside in a garden home. Do you think they just slept out under the stars? It appears that Eden was located in or near modern-day Iraq, ancient Mesopotamia. Just think, today the Middle East is such a caldron of pain, strife, and war, and it is the place where Eden was.

Just One Thing (Gen. 2:15–17)

God gives Adam and Eve the job of keeping the garden. What do you think this means? How was this different from the curse in Genesis 3:17–19? There is only

one rule: They cannot eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The consequence will be death. For such a dire consequence this instruction seems so brief. You might want to read in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 52–54, for more insight into what the Lord did to prepare and prevent Adam and Eve from eating the fruit.

Now That Is Prime Rib! (Gen. 2:18–25)

That first Friday must have seemed like a long day! Land animals were created. Adam was created, and then he gave names to these animals and the birds. It even appears that Adam had time to feel a little lonely (verses 18, 20). All of this takes place on the sixth day, Friday, before Eve was created.

Why does God use a different recipe when He makes Eve—or does He? God's way of creating Eve is meant to be a living parable for the relationship marriage partners are to have. The images of ribs, bones, and one flesh are all powerful ones. What are the lessons we can learn from these images?

In verses 21–24 God invents marriage. In his commentary on this chapter, Matthew Henry* says that God establishes two institutions in Eden: the Sabbath and marriage. The first one, the Sabbath, is for our relationship with the Lord; and the second one, marriage, is for our relationship to each other and society. Both these institutions are taking a beating today. Nearly every culture throughout history has celebrated some kind of marriage ceremony, and it appears to be the glue that holds societies together.

REACT

1. How is marriage a society builder?
2. God wasn't tired on that first Sabbath, so what does it mean that He rested?
3. Why do you think the majority of the Christian world believes in an immortal soul?
4. Can you find Scripture that appears to support the immortality of the soul?
5. What is the significance of the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil being close to each other (Gen. 2:9)?
6. The last part of verse 20 says no suitable helper was found for Adam. What did Adam need help with? In what ways were the animal pairs the same as Adam and Eve and how were they different?
7. Compare Genesis 2:21–24 with 3:16 (last part). What is the ideal? Can we extrapolate from these verses anything about the relationship between men and women in general?
8. Why do you think God added verse 25 to the end of Genesis 2? What are the lessons to be learned?
9. There are so few verses to describe Adam and Eve's time in Eden. How long do you think they lived in Eden before the Fall?

*<<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/MatthewHenryComplete>>

Let There Be Marriage

TESTIMONY

Gen. 2:18, 20-24

As Christians our marriages should serve as an example of the benefits that come from having God at the center of our marital relations. Ellen White best describes the higher calling of Christian marriage in this passage from *Messages to Young People*: "Marriage is something that will influence and affect your life, both in this world and in the world to come. A sincere Christian will not advance his plans in this direction without the knowledge that God approves his course. He will not want to choose for himself, but will feel that God must choose for him. We are not to please ourselves, for Christ pleased not Himself. I would not be understood to mean that anyone is to marry one whom he does not love. This would be sin. But fancy and the emotional nature must not be allowed to lead on to ruin. God requires the whole heart, the supreme affections."¹

Young people should take great care in choosing a marriage partner; it is better to be single than unhappily married. We should wait for our own personal growth to be complete before we rush into becoming the other half of a couple. "The good of society, as well as the highest interest of the students, demands that they shall not attempt to select a life partner while their own character is yet undeveloped [and] their judgment immature."²

**Being single is a blessing
not a curse.**

Being single is a blessing not a curse. It gives one the opportunity to mature, accomplish personal ambitions, and become comfortable in your skin. Most important, it is when you are single that you can develop your character and enter marriage a complete individual. A marriage is a lot easier to maintain between two fully developed and mature individuals. If it is to last through to the end of "happily ever after," marriage requires genuine principled love (the kind described in 1 Corinthians 13) and sincere communication. Marriage ushers a couple into the beginning of their love affair, not the end; therefore, it is a step we should take prayerfully and intelligently.

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 460.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 442.

Glory That Haunts Us

EVIDENCE

Genesis 2; 3

As I read Genesis 2, I am fascinated by the extent to which this short passage haunts our world. Even more interesting is the way in which the chapter shapes the images of the Advent movement.

To the world, this chapter gives a brief glimpse of what once was. From here on, whether in political science or in a study of myths, humankind moves ahead while glancing over their shoulder to glimpse what is lost.

For the Advent movement we can only begin to count the influences: God's creative love, the state of the soul, the nature of marriage, the nature of rest, the true Sabbath, the original home. There is much more.

Here is the foundation of God's love. God speaks the world into being, but He molds man and gently breathes into the waiting nostrils. What care! Such tenderness! What is the spirit? What is the soul? Here we see that God breathed *neshamah* into man's nostrils and he became a living *nefesh*. We see the breath as spirit and the man as soul. It is the foundation of understanding our nature of humanity.

God takes a portion from Adam's side and fashions woman. She is neither above nor below.

Here is the metaphor for the nature of marriage. Here is the equality of women that has been the glory of truly Christian homes.

We see Adam organizing the animals by naming them. We understand our drive to organize. Further, we see the longing in Adam's perfect heart for someone like himself. We look into our hearts and see the same longing.

We see that God rested. Obviously, He was not tired. The rest on Sabbath is about growth, companionship, worship. God rested on the Sabbath that He made. He did not rest in anything that man made.

Finally we see the Garden. So many things happen with God in gardens—from Eden, to Gethsemane, to the earth made new. In the fragrance of growing plants, we find our true measure of happiness.

So here is such a foundation of Adventist ideals. God loves people. He breathes into humankind to make him a living soul. Women stand beside men as equals in the proclamation of the final message. We work in an organized fashion. We want to enter the final Sabbath rest. We worship on the Sabbath of His choice. And, lo and behold, we idealize country living. Indeed, to know Genesis 3 is the beginning of knowing Adventism.

Here is the foundation of
God's love.

How to Have a Meaningful Relationship

HOW-TO

Gen. 2:5, 6, 15–17, 23; Prov. 11:9; 15:4; Eccles. 9:9; Matt. 25:29

Ever since humans were created, we've been searching for an answer to having a great relationship. How can we have a friendship that lasts a lifetime? What is the secret of a happy marriage? How can we get along with our parents and siblings? What do we need to do to be the salt of the world at the workplace or at school? How can we expect to have a good relationship with God when we don't even have a good relationship with each other?

God created a male and a female (Genesis 2). He told us that we should not be alone; we must have a relationship with other human beings. The God who created Adam and Eve also wants us to have a meaningful relationship with each other today. So, what is the secret of having a great relationship?

1. A solid foundation upon which to build your relationship (Gen. 2:5, 6).

Before God created humans, He prepared an earth filled with vegetation. Imagine what chaos it would have been if God had created animals and humans before He created plants to support the life on earth. Likewise, all relationships require basics such as trust, commitment, communication, and time. Any relationship built on a strong foundation will bear the fruit of a successful relationship.

Every relationship requires effort.

2. Effort (Gen. 2:15). Just as a neglected garden will not produce much fruit (if any at all), a neglected relationship will not produce love. Relationships are a gift from God. We have a responsibility not only to keep them as we have received them but to grow and multiply good fruit (Matt. 25:29).

3. The right fruit (Gen. 2:16, 17). When God gave the perfect garden to Adam and Eve, He also gave them the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Just as they had a choice to eat either the fruit of the tree of life or the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we have a choice either to hurt or uplift others with our words. Solomon tells us in Proverbs that the tongue that brings healing is a tree of life (Prov. 15:4), but the godless destroys his neighbor with his tongue (Prov. 11:9).

4. Enjoyment (Gen. 2:23). In today's society, where we're all searching for meaning in life and relationships, the wise man of God tells us that we should enjoy life with our spouse, which is our gift from God (Eccles. 9:9).

What's the Point?

OPINION

Gen. 2:4-7, 19, 20

Genesis 2 covers a lot of territory, but has a central theme: humanity's purpose on earth. I think all of us, at one time or another, have wondered if there was a purpose, a meaning, to our lives. Thank God He gave us a purpose and told us what it was! There is a point to our lives.

It is interesting that this chapter begins with the blessing of the Sabbath. The first reason we have for living is to worship, to honor the Creator of our world. For many of us, the Sabbath day is a wonderful, relaxing way to end the week, but this was not how it was for Adam and Eve. Sabbath was instead a day to rejoice in the creation of their new world. In fact it was the first full day for Adam and Eve. One of our purposes, then, is to get to know God, to take that one day in seven to seek companionship and knowledge with Him.

God also designed work for Adam and Eve. They were to work the ground, grow the plants, and care for the animals. In fact verse 5 specifically says that no shrub or plant of the field had grown up because there was no one to work the ground. To work is a God-given purpose for existing. We cannot fully enjoy the creation given to us unless we work.

We cannot fully enjoy the creation given to us unless we work.

Another purpose of humanity is to obey the laws of God. No world, no community, can operate without laws. It was simple in the Garden: "Don't eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil." God is not unreasonable in His expectations.

Finally, humankind was given marriage. We have social obligations under God. Human companionship is as necessary as worship; friends and family fulfill a need that God designed in us. We cannot survive on our own. Divide and conquer is a tool Satan will readily use against us if we let him. Does this mean that each of us needs to marry? Of course not! Paul says, "I wish everyone could get along without marrying, just as I do. But we are not all the same. God gives some the gift of marriage, and to others he gives the gift of singleness" (1 Cor. 7:7, NLT).

Regardless, we must have help through life from people we can trust and turn to. Don't try to handle all of life's difficulties, or even joys, on your own. You weren't created to live like that.

So, does it really matter how I live today? Does Genesis 2 still outline God's intended purpose for my life? I believe so. We need to stand by what God wants for us, because as we honor His purpose for our lives, it only improves our lives here.

Sarah Moss, Lacombe, Canada

Created for a Purpose

EXPLORATION

Genesis 2

CONCLUDE

In the book of Genesis, chapter 2, we find the second of the Bible's creation narratives. Several of our key Adventist Christian beliefs come to us from this account: God purposefully created our earth and all that is in it. He gave us a life work and an ordained day of rest. He also gave us our understanding of marriage.

CONSIDER

- Writing your own "creation narrative" for something you can make to benefit others. This might be a batch of cookies for a new neighbor, or a tape or CD of your favorite gospel songs to share with a friend, or a video cabinet for your church's library.
- Compiling a list of activities that are appropriate for true Sabbath rest. This coming Sabbath, engage in one or more of those activities while you focus on growth, companionship, and worship.
- Creating a drawing or a collage with images or symbols that represent each of the concepts introduced in Genesis 2 (God, earth, man, woman, Sabbath, marriage, etc.).
- Looking through *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* or another hymnal for songs about the Sabbath. As you sing some of these songs, notice how the lyrics interpret the idea of the Sabbath as a day of rest.
- Meditating on your own God-created purpose. What do you think God has charged you to do instead of tending Eden's garden?

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 2; Alice P. Matthews and M. Gay Hubbard, *Marriage Made in Eden: A Pre-Modern Perspective for a Post-Christian World*; Commentaries on Genesis 2 at <<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getMainPage&source=2>>; Dorothy C. Bass, "Keeping Sabbath: Reviving a Christian Practice" at <<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=318>>.

Paradise Lost



“ ‘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’ ” (Gen. 3:15, NKJV).

Finding Honor Among Thieves

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 3:15

A juvenile delinquent, Petey sits alone in the dark thinking of his break into the life of crime. As the rays of the dying sun cast shadows on the bars on the opposite wall, Petey recounts screaming matches between his parents.

Constantly shadowed by violence, Petey's childhood was tempestuous. His parents showed little interest in him. He soon attracted the attention of drug peddlers. He found in them a family that believed in him and trusted him. When asked if he felt any remorse about his life and the pain he had caused the families of his victims, Petey's expressionless face spoke a thousand words. As adamantly as he maintained his innocence, he reports having no sense of guilt for all the crimes he had been convicted of and sent to jail for.

The therapist speaks of this as the all-too-common case of bad parenting. She had met children fleeing from violence in the home. The boys end up doing time and in the process missing out on the crucial aspects of their development. The

prison system often fails to reach the goal of rehabilitating and integrating them back into their families. Young girls will feel unwanted and start to seek acceptance elsewhere, often turning to prostitution to feel the love and acceptance that the family

**The therapist speaks of this
as the all-too-common case
of bad parenting.**

deprives them of.

Petey's brief sojourn in the free world came to an abrupt end as he stood before the magistrate. He was convicted on three charges of murder and multiple counts of assault with grievous bodily harm.

As he sits here and contemplates what the rest of his life will be, Petey is haunted by the words of the therapist who traced his ill fate back to his family. His family had denied him of his birthright: the graces of love, acceptance, showing faith in him, encouraging him to dream, inspiration, positive affirmation and praise, and a genuine interest in his well-being. All the things necessary for normal living and all the things he tried to find in the wrong social structure.

Petey, like Adam and Eve, had eaten from the forbidden tree and, like them, had his whole being poisoned with the evil that at first looked so attractive.

From Eve to Adam to Cain

EVIDENCE

Rom. 5:19

Because of a wrong translation of Romans 5:12 in the Vulgate of Jerome (the Latin translation of the Bible), the so-called doctrine of original sin was developed. Jerome translated the last part of verse 12 as "in whom all sinned," thereby suggesting that all people sinned when Adam sinned. Adventists do not accept the idea of the transmission of personal guilt through either legal imputation (as in Calvin) or genetic propagation (as in Augustine). The best way to understand Romans 5:12 is in the light of Romans 5:19, which states that all humans were constituted (*kathistimi*) as sinners because of Adam's sin. Therefore, when Romans 5:12 says that death came to all people "because all sinned," it does not indicate that the death of individual sinners comes through the personal sin of these individuals, but because of the sin-situation into which Adam's sin plunged the whole human race. The phrase "because all sinned" is both a reason for all dying and, like death, an effect of Adam's sin. The tense "because all sinned" emphasizes entrance or initiation into a state or a condition: The sin that Adam "worked in," every one through their personal sins (Rom. 5:16) "worked out."

**Adventists do not accept
the idea of the transmission
of personal guilt.**

What is this sin-situation that is both an effect of Adam's sin and a cause for the death of all? Paul does not specifically explain it here in Romans 5. But in the light of his other writings, as well as Scripture as a whole, it appears to be a fatal complex of estrangement from God, with the consequent loss of original righteousness (Eph. 2:11, 12), and inherited and cultivated tendencies to sin (Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:1-3). However, just as righteousness is fully provided for all by Christ but requires personal appropriation by faith to validate it individually, so the sin of Adam that generates sin, condemnation, and death in all who share his fallen humanity only becomes accountable guilt (culpability) when at the age of responsibility the sinner knowingly and voluntarily indulges in the dictates of the depraved nature as a chosen way of life.

Because of his anger with God and his hatred for his righteous brother Abel, the will of Cain became warped, as he chose to give lethal expression, as a way of life, to the fallen nature and the sin-situation inherited from his parents. As such, he chose to become one of the seeds of the serpent.

No Place to Hide

LOGOS

Gen. 3:1–4:26; Pss. 27:1, 5; 139:7; Heb. 4:12, 13; Rev. 6:10

No Place to Hide From the Word of God (Heb. 4:12, 13)

After being drawn into a fatal dialogue with Satan by a deceptive half-truth about the Word of God, Eve quotes His Word in a way that magnifies God's strictness. This sentiment is immediately seized upon by Satan, when he directly contradicts God's Word: "'You surely shall not die!'" (Gen. 3:4, NASB). This lie is immediately followed by an attack on God's integrity toward Adam and Eve: He is keeping knowledge and wisdom from them, because of His fear that they might acquire moral autonomy, thus becoming equal to Him as God (Gen. 3:5).

What Eve, and Adam later on, did not realize was that Satan was not only casting doubt in the truthfulness of God and His Word but also attacking the essential being of man as the image of God, who can truly live as God's image only in total trust of God and solely to the glory of God. If they had to succumb to the tempta-

tion to be as God, it would be "a direct denial of all that it meant to be in the image of God." The irony of the situation was that Adam and Eve already had the knowledge that Satan was offering them, since a knowledge that would lead to authentic human life was implicit in

Adam and Eve already had the knowledge that Satan was offering them.

the command to eat from one tree and not to eat from the other tree. True knowledge would be experienced by the first human pair by continuing to receive gratefully the good of the tree of life and by rejecting the experiential knowledge of evil that Satan was offering to them.

The essential nature of the sin of Adam and Eve was disobedience to God and His Word, since all the other aspects of sin, such as disloyalty, faithlessness, and unbelief, are presupposed in disobedience to God. If they had chosen obedience to God, it would have been a confirmation of their trust in God and loyalty and faithfulness to God, and thus they would be established in the ways of righteousness and faith. Faith in God is the supreme act of obedience to God (John 6:29).

No Place to Hide From God's Presence (Ps. 139:7)

Instead of the promised elevation to the sphere of godhood promised by Satan, Adam and Eve almost immediately experienced the humiliating "nakedness of

soul”² outwardly symbolized by the nakedness of their bodies unprotected by the holiness and the righteousness with which God originally endowed them. With an overpowering sense of sin and a dread of the future, “they fled in terror, and sought to hide in the deepest recesses of the garden.”³

In seeking to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord, they were in fact trying to hide from each other and from themselves. They were experiencing one of the first consequences of sin, namely, alienation from God, from each other, and from their true self. This first “cover-up” was indeed estrangement from the very source of all life and goodness.

As the prophet Jonah later on discovered, no created being can run away or hide from an omniscient, omnipresent God. The very nature of God as a God of love moves Him to be a seeking God, pursuing even the worst of sinners to the ends of the earth, not to condemn, but to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; John 3:17).

In calling to Adam with the searching words “Where are you?” God was eliciting confession, not information. But with these words He was also beginning a somber court session, foreshadowing His later covenant lawsuits in Israel, which always included divine investigation and deliberation. Their evasive and self-justifying response revealed the tragic fact that now they could no longer help but sin. Tragically “all these attempts to maintain innocence by transferring guilt to someone else were attempts of the fallen, sinful creature to hide from itself what it had become.”⁴ And what man had become was a depraved, lost sinner that was, so to speak, imploding on himself. And although Scripture never explains precisely how this took place, Adam and Eve passed their loss of original righteousness and their depravity on to their descendants, so that all of humankind inherited sin, condemnation, and death from Adam (Job 14:4; Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22).

1. M. D. Gow, “Fall” in *Doctrine of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, eds. D. Alexander and R. W. Baker (Leicester, England, IVP, 2003), p. 287.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 57.

3. *Ibid.*

4. J. Daane, “The fall” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Wm. Eerdmans, 1982), p. 278.

Choices Are Followed by Consequences

TESTIMONY

Josh. 24:15

She is looking at a tree that fascinates her not just because of its beauty and uniqueness but because she has been forbidden to eat its fruit. Suddenly she hears a voice; it is coming from a very attractive creature, a serpent. The beautiful creature with its deceptive tone employs sophistry and fraud in inciting Eve to disrupt the happiness and peace of their Edenic paradise. Eve's choice to eat from the forbidden tree resulted in severe consequences to the rest of humanity.

"No longer free to stir up rebellion in heaven, Satan's enmity against God found a new field in plotting the ruin of the human race. In the happiness and peace of the holy pair in Eden he beheld a vision of the bliss that to him was forever lost. Moved by envy, he determined to incite them to disobedience, and bring upon them the guilt and penalty of sin. . . . Our first parents were not left without a warning of the danger that threatened them. Heavenly messengers opened to them the history of Satan's fall and his plots for their destruction, unfolding more fully the nature of the divine government, which the prince of evil was trying to overthrow. It was by dis-

**"The angels warned them
to be on their guard."**

obedience to the just commands of God that Satan and his host had fallen. How important, then, that Adam and Eve should honor that law by which alone it was possible for order and equity to be maintained.

"The law of God is as sacred as God Himself. It is a revelation of His will, a transcript of His character, the expression of divine love and wisdom."¹

"The angels warned them to be on their guard against the devices of Satan; for his efforts to ensnare them would be unwearied. While they were obedient to God, the evil one could not harm them; for, if need be, every angel in heaven would be sent to their help. If they steadfastly repelled his first insinuations, they would be as secure as the heavenly messengers. . . . The tree of knowledge had been made a test of their obedience and their love to God. . . . Satan was not to follow them with continual temptations, he could have access to them only at the forbidden tree."²

Humanity in its closing scenes of this earth's history is faced with two choices: allegiance to the Prince of Peace or allegiance to the prince of evil. What will be your daily choice?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 52.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

Let's Fix It

HOW-TO

Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1; Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:10

Humankind's quest to perfect the image of God can never be found in itself, for the degradation wrought by sin is beyond human ability to fix (Jer. 17:9). It requires divine intervention.

The best place to begin in this process of repairing the marred image is to recognize, understand, and appreciate that we are sinners and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). Only when we come to a realization of the shattered image of God in us will we be able to see the need for restoration. Ellen White says that "the Lord Jesus is making experiments on human hearts through the exhibition of His mercy and abundant grace. He is effecting transformations so amazing that Satan, with all his triumphant boasting, with all his confederacy of evil united against God and the laws of His government, stands viewing them as a fortress impregnable to his sophistries and delusions."¹

The restoration of the image of God in humankind requires re-creation and not merely a patching up (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26). To reflect fully the image of God, humanity must experience the change of heart that the prophet Ezekiel envisioned.

**We are what we eat and
drink.**

Renunciation of that which helps to disfigure the image of God in humanity is the next step to take. Diet is cardinal to the physiological makeup of humankind, and therefore a perverted appetite is detrimental to qualitative life, which leads to a deficient spiritual life. Ellen White further states that a close connection exists between the physical and the moral nature.²

Obedience to God in our dietary behavior is fundamental to the restoration of God's image in us, for we are what we eat and drink. A human being needs a clear, energetic mind to appreciate the exalted character of the truth. Good dietary practice will avail much in shaping our minds to be ennobled by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

In a nutshell, to restore the image of God in humanity, we need to realize the state from which we have fallen (Rom. 3:23), how desperate our situation has become (Jer. 17:9), and how we can do nothing good of our own (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 7:24). Then we can look for help from God (Rev. 2:5).

1. *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 222.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 129.

Looking Through a Glass Darkly

OPINION

1 Cor. 13:12

It is easier to understand what the human race forfeited through the fall of our first parents when a person looks at Paradise restored in the last two chapters of the Apocalypse of John. But since future realities are mostly signified by symbolic language, the exact nature of the promised home of the redeemed will at best be faintly understood.

1. The restoration of life. Fullness of life is symbolized by the crystal clear water of life that flows from the throne of God as well as the restored tree of life that gives its healing power unceasingly to the nations. The character of God as expressed in His gracious reign translates into authentic existence for the human race. Through the Fall this quality of life was largely lost.

2. The restoration of fellowship. God's often repeated covenant formula in the Old Testament was that He will be Israel's God, they will be His people, and He will dwell among them. This is now ultimately fulfilled, but mentioned in a reversed order in Revelation 21:3, almost as if to indicate that what began with God will end

with God. No longer experiencing Him through a poor reflection (1 Cor. 13:12), the saved will know God directly, since He will dwell among them. That is why the structure of the city is a perfect square, reminis-

**The saved will know God
directly.**

cent of the Most Holy of the earthly sanctuary where God's glory dwelt.

3. The restoration of the moral image of God. Those who enter the New Jerusalem have the name of God on their foreheads, which is a symbol of the moral perfection of God reflected in the minds of His saints (Exod. 34:5-7; Rev. 14:1). All who enter the city of God also enter through wide open pearly gates that bear the names of the tribes of Israel. And all who go inside the city pass within walls built on the foundation of the apostles, whose names are inscribed on its brilliant stones. Those who enter Paradise will reflect in their lives the same glory of God that was reflected in the faithful of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

REACT

1. What is the light of God that illuminates Paradise restored?
2. In what way can the image of God even now be restored?

Imagining the City From Afar

EXPLORATION

Heb. 11:13–16

CONCLUDE

“No one’s ever seen or heard anything like this,
Never so much as imagined anything like it—
What God has arranged for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9, *The Message*).

This promise notwithstanding, Scripture does not discourage Christians from trying to envision a time and place free from even the memory of sin. In fact, Scripture commends faithful women and men of the past for their attempts to view the City of God from a long way off (Heb. 11:13–16). Those who saw from afar employed sanctified imagination with positive, life-changing results. What a splendid heritage of faith they have given us!

CONSIDER

- Creating and presenting a multiparticipant *reader’s theatre* of scriptures describing the reality of heaven and the new earth from the perspective of the redeemed.
- Paraphrasing the final paragraph of *The Great Controversy* and sharing these words with someone who could use some encouragement.
- Listening several times to your favorite song about Christ’s second coming, heaven, and/or the new earth. Each time, imagine yourself being present in the scenes the music describes.
- Responding to a sincere critic who says that Christians who focus on God’s future for them lose sight of present needs and realities in our world.
- Reflecting on Christ’s prayer in Matthew 6:9, 10, what is God’s will for you on earth as you prepare for the coming kingdom of heaven?

CONNECT

The Great Controversy, pp. 674–678.

Online version of the last chapter of *The Great Controversy*:

<<http://www.whiteestate.org/books/gc/gc42.html>>.

Karl Haffner, *The Cure for the Last Daze*; C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

Destruction and Renewal



“ ‘The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth’ ”
(Gen. 9:16, NKJV).

A Painful Decision

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 6:8, 9

We take the existence of many things—such as a tiny flower, a cute kitten, or the goldfish in the bowl—for granted. However, have you ever thought of the God who is the only One who can create such varied and complicated things?

For me the most uplifting part of the Bible is Creation. One of my best childhood memories is the moments when my brother and I could listen to my grandpa telling the stories on the birth of life. At that time everything seemed to be marvelous and perfect. Over the years I have been able to understand what really happened after the Creation.

What feelings could God have experienced seeing the perfection being destroyed, seeing the attack of sin and its proliferation? What pain made Him destroy the creation?

If Noah could remain righteous, why could the other people not do the same? Did the others not want to live on? Would it not have been better to live in a perfect world?

The answer seems to be simple, but it is very disappointing too. After the Fall humankind damaged their relationship with the Father. Lucifer wanted to surpass God. His hardened heart separated him from the Person who loved him best.

Imagine that God asks you to build an ark because He is going to bring a flood of waters on the earth to destroy all life. What would your reaction be?

Did Noah ever have any doubt? Did he ever question why? Scripture has no reference to this. On the other hand, "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:9, NKJV).

Whom do you listen to when God Himself turns to you and asks you to do something? Noah's belief and obedience are examples for all of us. God knew very well that Noah was the only one who had the right to enter the ark with his family. He was the only righteous man, and God used him to rebuild the world after the destruction. Noah was a device in God's hand.

This is the central issue of this week's study.

**Imagine that God asks you
to build an ark.**

The Story of Noah

LOGOS

Gen. 1:28–31; 2:6; 5:32–9:29; Rom. 8:38, 39; 1 John 5:12

“Noah’s ark was built by amateurs. The *Titanic* was built by professionals.” A lot of people have dealt with the story of Noah in a lot of ways. Therefore it seems that there is nothing new that could be told about this ancient story. But if we look at the introductory sentence then we start thinking because more and more secrets become evident about Noah’s life. The biblical story is still unclear for the scientists, and all the search of the past centuries has not found the ark, but for us—Christian believers who accept the Bible as God’s Word—it is a whole different story.

The first time the name of Noah appears in the Bible is Genesis 5:32. In Genesis 6:5 we read that “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” (NKJV). This is a heartbreaking and shocking description of the contemporary social life. What could life be like in those days? Probably they did not respect each other, there were no human rights, law enforcement was corrupt, and the rich and

**God’s command was simple:
Build an ark.**

strong were always right. If someone needed something and was lazy enough to reject working for it and had a possibility to take it, then probably the person took it by force. As in every society like this, women, chil-

dren, and the elderly were the most defenseless. Rape, beatings, and spiritual and physical humiliation were possibly common issues those days. Caring for the elderly or respect for them became unknown.

How can we know what those times were like? It is enough to look around in our contemporary society, and we can grasp an image of that world. But it is more frightening if we read: “The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them’” (verses 6, 7, NKJV). It sounds as if the project did not succeed, the prototype was not good enough—these are the words we would use to describe a similar event nowadays. We can see from Scripture that it was painful for God to witness all these events, but He did not look at it as a setback. He did not reject His intentional plan (1:28–31). Moreover, after what appeared to be a failure, He sought a new beginning. Though the evil He cannot stand had overwhelmed the earth, He found people who were ready to execute His plan. And these people were Noah and his family (6:8).

God's commandment was simple: Build an ark that provided space for Noah, his family, and all that were meant to be saved. The dimensions of the ark shows that it was much smaller than the *Titanic*. It was built not in a dockyard with hundreds of workers but by the hands of a family. It was a tremendous effort to collect and to carry all the materials needed for the ark and to build it according to plan. We do not know how much help Noah and his family received. Probably not much.

A work motivated by the fear of a never-experienced natural disaster does not endure long. Maybe in the beginning of Noah's work, some of the listeners had accepted his warning message. Though they did not know what rain was, because of the dew every morning (2:6), the effort at the beginning of the ark's construction must have kept their attention alive for a while. But with the passing of time, their fear-motivated enthusiasm dropped. This is the natural way of it. Though fear is strong, it does not give long-lasting motivation. Nothing happened, there was no rain, and men started to mock Noah. Those who were helping in the beginning became the greatest scoffers. They felt swindled and before they became the targets of the mockery, they attacked Noah louder than the others. But the building of the ark did not stop, and this condemned the people.

Noah told them the reason for building an ark: to stop the spread of evil. So there were only two options: either silence his or her conscience and join the mockers or accept the persecution and join the family. According to Scripture, no one chose the latter.

Noah and his family had some terrible years. They had to work for a living and had to spend all their spare time building the ark. Therefore the lack of free time and the constant mockery were a negative influence on the spiritual and physical state of the families. Genesis 6:9 tells us the secret of Noah's family: "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (NKJV). These are very important words, but, of course, this does not mean that Noah was sinless. This does not mean that he did not make mistakes or did not have any flaws in his character. If we read the rest of the story after the Flood (9:20–27), we can see it clearly. But before God no one is perfect.

Walking with God meant that Noah was aware of these deficiencies. He faced them and recognized that without God he was nothing. Therefore he submitted himself to the Lord. Walking with God is like a marriage. When a couple love each other, they cling together and love each other unconditionally. Living with the Source of Life will result in eternal life: "Whoever has God's Son has life" (1 John 5:12, NLT). Nobody could take that away from Noah, neither mocking, nor rejection, nor the long hours of work. He loved his Lord, trusted His promises, accepted the Word of God, and became the great survivor of his age.

WWF: Worldwide Flood

TESTIMONY

Gen. 6:5–8

"Noah and his family were not alone in fearing and obeying God. But Noah was the most pious and holy of any upon the earth, and was the one whose life God preserved to carry out His will in building the ark and warning the world of its coming doom. Methuselah, the grandfather of Noah, lived until the very year of the Flood; and there were others who believed the preaching of Noah, and aided him in building the ark, who died before the flood of waters came upon the earth.¹

Noah's job was not only building the ark but also preaching the oncoming destruction to everybody around him. Just imagine what an ungrateful task this was. First of all, he told them that all humanity would die, and second, that it would be the result of a worldwide flood. There was no rain before, but he had to talk about a flood of waters. And it took him years to build the ark and to preach in the meantime.

Probably the last warning sign was when the animals entered the ark. It was the manifestation of God's omnipotent power, but humanity's wickedness was so big that it did not affect them. The door of the ark shut in front of them. Seven days passed and nothing happened. It seemed that the outsiders would triumph.

They were having a feast and they were cursing God. But then humans had to suffer for their hardheartedness! Every creature outside the ark had to die.

The situation is similar to the one that we are approaching. Ellen White says the following about those events in the last days: "Soon I saw the saints suffering great mental anguish. They seemed to be surrounded by the wicked inhabitants of the earth. Every appearance was against them. Some began to fear that God had at last left them to perish by the hand of the wicked. But if their eyes could have been opened, they would have seen themselves surrounded by angels of God. . . ."

"For His name's glory He would deliver every one of those who had patiently waited for Him and whose names were written in the book."²

1. *The Story of Redemption*, p. 63.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 407.

A Clear Sky With a Rainbow

EVIDENCE

Ezek. 1:28

Unfortunately, scientific evidence seems to impact biblical facts, and when scientists explained the reason for the rainbow, many people forgot the original reason for it. When scientists give us evidence that explains a natural phenomenon, it does not mean that our beliefs in the authority of the Bible must be questioned.

Rainbows can be explained as a natural effect of suspended water particles and sunlight. Before the Flood there was no rain; therefore, human eyes could not have seen a rainbow in the sky. It was literally God who put the rainbow in the sky, because "God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament" (Gen. 1:7, NKJV). Now God made these waters fall down from the sky in the form of rain.

Unfortunately, there are destructive floods that destroy life. These floods can be so enormous that they move houses. Whenever there is rain and I see a rainbow, however, it reminds me that there is not enough water in the skies that would be able to flood the entire earth and destroy it.

The tsunami in Sri Lanka moved a whole island and changed the outline of the whole area. Scientists thought that it takes several millen-

nia for an island to move, and they were shocked to see such effects. Imagine what earthquakes and movement of islands and continents could have resulted when half the amount of today's water began to pour down from the sky. Thanks to God, Noah and his family were in the safest place on the earth: in a boat never tested on water but designed by the Creator.

**Noah and his family were in
the safest place on the
earth.**

REACT

1. How do you react when science contradicts biblical facts?
2. What do you say to people who lost everything in a flood concerning the promise of God? (Gen. 9:15).

Avoiding the Flood

HOW-TO

Gen. 6:11–14

I do not even have to watch the news because the neighbors are so loud. I know that something is not OK. The night has arrived and I hear the rampaging and drunken people around our block of flats. I go to work and we discuss the awful state of politics, the corruption in our world. Wars rage around us in the world, and there is a war going on for our souls.

I go home and try to watch the TV, but I just cannot find any channel that would fit me. Murder and rape, sexuality and blasphemy, and these are not even R rated. Where am I? It is 2005 now, and it is the European Union, Hungary. Not the most wicked part of the world, but I clearly sense that “the earth also [is] corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence” (Gen. 6:11, NKJV).

There is a battle going on for our souls, and we cannot hide physically in an ark to avoid the evil flood. But there is an ark that gives you shelter when you need it. Jesus Christ protects you from the violence and corruption of this world.

There is a battle going on for our souls.

Here are some steps on how you can help others avoid the flood:

- 1. Live a just and perfect life (Gen. 6:9).** Though it seems to be difficult, begin your day as if you were blind and must rely fully on the guidance of Jesus. In this way you will also walk with God. He is like a bodyguard: The enemy will not risk attacking you with such a Friend on your side.
- 2. Build an ark that resists the flood (Gen. 6:14).** You have to do everything according to the guidance of God. Read the Bible, and act accordingly. Do everything that He tells you to do. If He says pitch it within and without with pitch, do not replace pitch with grease: It will not resist the flood of water.
- 3. While building the ark, ask people to join you.** Start with your friends who believe in God so you can build the ark together. Begin a prayer group and pray for those around you. If their eyes are open, they will see the wickedness of today's world.
- 4. Always give thanks to the Lord (Gen. 8:20).** Never forget that it is Jesus Christ who is helping you from the moment you have been born, and He is the One who already died for you on the cross. Give thanks every day for His protection, for the ark, and for the fact that there will be no flood that destroys the entire human race.

You have been briefed. You know your mission. You are armed and dangerous. Now go and fight against the wickedness and corruption of this world.

Precious Treasure: Noah or His Ark?

OPINION

Gen. 5:32–9:29

Human curiosity has fueled the search for Noah's ark, which has fascinated everyone from Noah's time to our own. There have been all kinds of debates as to the whereabouts of the ark. But isn't it embarrassing that people care more about a tool in God's plan than about a person whose example is worthy to be followed?

Noah's story proves the fact that as far as people are concerned, the world hasn't changed so much as scientists and others prefer to claim. If Noah had a chance to pop up in our time, he would experience almost the same situation he lived in. He would meet people who pursue the individualistic search for personal fulfillment and autonomy. He would encounter people who deny the existence of God or, much worse, people who believe that taking an interest in any kind of religion is beneficial—it matters not which. Unfortunately, we Christians are also likely to follow this spiritually destructive way of life. But our existence resulted from the purposeful act of a loving and caring God who made human beings "in his own image" (Gen. 1:27, NIV). Thus, we should not be misled.

Like Noah we must not allow anything to hinder us from following God's instructions: We must fight evil. In these days, people care a lot for the environment, and they fight a

lot against discrimination and violence. Still, the problem is that "people want only to combat the excesses of evil, but do not want to eradicate evil. They struggle against certain manifestations of evil without recognizing the root of evil."* They do good things, but they do not fight an all-out war on evil inclinations and motives. This week's topic is destruction and renewal. So let us allow the Holy Spirit to eliminate the roots of evil and to renew us in such a way that our life conduct would motivate other people to follow God.

**We must not allow anything
to hinder us from following
God's instructions.**

REACT

1. Can you imagine that you and your family are the only people who fear God? How could you handle this situation?

2. We saw that it is not enough to combat the excesses of evil. How can we eradicate evil?

*Rául Kerbs, "Ethics in Postmodernism," *Dialogue*, vol. 14, no. 2.

Saved From the Floodwaters

EXPLORATION

Gen 6:6, 13, 14; 7:5

CONCLUDE

It must have pained the heart of God to see His creation turn so terribly wicked to the point that He regretted having created the world. Noah's relationship with God must have been extremely strong for him to have remained uninfluenced by the people and the lifestyle that surrounded him. When we desire to follow God, He provides not only a way but also the strength to face ridicule.

CONSIDER

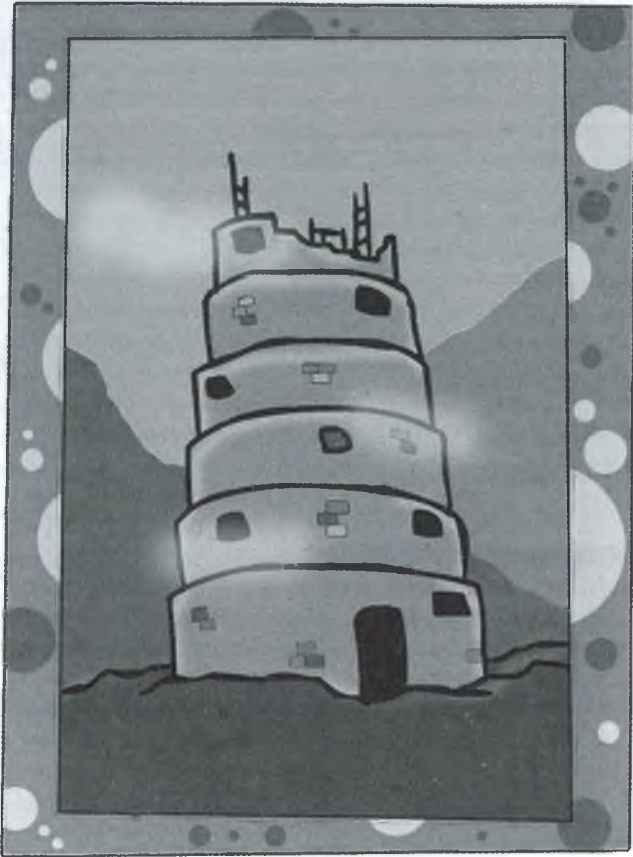
- Imagining that you are a reporter during the time Noah is building the ark. Report on what you would see and hear at the scene.
- Collecting photographs of cities/places affected by major floods. Reflect on the devastation caused and how much greater the results must have been, because the Flood affected the whole world.
- Organizing a party with a "Noah's ark" theme. Have guests share qualities they wish to develop in order to be one who "[finds] grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8).
- Composing a poem focusing on the period of waiting before the rains came. Write it from the perspective of one of Noah's sons. Focus on the anticipation of waiting as well as the excitement as you hear/feel the first drops of rain.
- Measuring out the dimensions of the ark in a field or an empty parking lot with a group of friends. Calculate the amount of material and time that would be involved in constructing the ark today. Consider the faith Noah must have had to begin the great task God gave him.

CONNECT

Genesis 6–9:17.

Spiritual Gifts, vol. 3, pp. 64–76.

The Earth after the Flood



“Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’ ” (2 Pet. 3:3, 4, NKJV).

Differences in Cultures

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 11:3–9

A few years ago my sociology class visited a Syrian exhibit at the museum. I could hardly wait to see this exhibit heavily steeped in Bible stories and full of antiquity. I was not disappointed. There were sculptures, burial masks, jewelry, and weapons. A six-holed flute, clay vessels, pictures of excavation sites, and conceptual art on life in Syria brought the Bible stories to life.

I once visited a Japanese exhibit. There were the usual lacquered vases, Samurai dolls, geisha headdresses, sashes, kimonos, portraits, and scenic paintings on large bamboo screens. And Japanese poems and proverbs hung on walls. One exhibit caught my attention. Draped over a mummy was a jade burial shroud. Several hundred one-inch squares of jade were sewn together to complete the shroud. This was its first trip outside Japan.

I often think about my own Filipino culture: how we greet our elders by taking their hands and pressing them to our foreheads for a blessing or how the traditional

**There was a time that the
earth had one language and
one speech.**

dances incorporate the Muslim, Spanish, and even military backgrounds. Even traditional Filipino weddings often incorporate Spanish influences, whether it is draping a large veil and gold cord, looped into a figure eight, over the couple or pin-

ning money on the couple as they dance. During parties, often the different dialects mingle with the sounds of music, as everyone socializes with each other.

In the Bible there was a time when the earth had one language and one speech. Then men decided to build a tower to heaven (Gen. 11:1, 3). In Genesis 11:6–8, God said, “Look! . . . If they can accomplish this when they have just begun to take advantage of their common language and political unity, just think of what they will do later. Nothing will be impossible for them! Come, let’s go down and give them different languages. Then they won’t be able to understand each other.” In that way, the Lord scattered them all over the earth; and that ended the building of the city” (NLT).

Since the failure of the Tower of Babel, the earth has been enriched with different cultures, languages, and traditions. It is interesting to think how the world would have been so mundane if everyone talked, dressed, and acted the same way. God definitely knew what He was doing when He gave everyone a different language and scattered them through the world.

“But I Liked ‘Before’ Better”

EVIDENCE

Gen. 9:20–25

Noah went from finding favor in the eyes of the Lord, “a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God” (Gen. 6:9, NIV) to lying naked in his tent, passed-out drunk. How could this happen? Noah knew both sides of the Creation. He grew up and lived the majority of his life to this point in “God’s country” as it came from the hand of its Maker. Now he had been living on this side of the Flood long enough to grow, harvest, press, and ferment grapes. Noah lost a lot in the Flood. And now seeing the lives of his children and grandchildren continuing in the same downward spiral, it becomes easier to understand why Noah would seek to medicate his emotional pain.

“Others think that Ham’s only sin here was in seeing Noah’s drunken, uncovered state, and making fun of him, mocking him as a father and as a man of God. Literally, the Hebrew says that Ham ‘told with delight’ what he had seen in his father’s tent. His heart was intent on mocking his father and undermining his authority as a man of God.”* To have his own son treat him with such disrespect may have compounded the guilt Noah must have felt at being caught exposed.

Noah lost a lot in the Flood.

Read Deuteronomy 4:9. What did Noah want to remember? What did he want to pass on to his descendents? To watch the loved ones he saved killing themselves through their sinful choices—choices beyond Noah’s control—must have hurt. And this time, Noah kept the pain to himself when God would have taken it freely.

REACT

1. What do these texts say about the heart? 1 Kings 3:9, 12; 2 Chron. 7:10; 32:25; Neh. 2:2; Job 31:9, 33; 33:3; Ps. 4:7; Matt. 12:34.
2. What are some “socially acceptable” emotional pain medications you know of? What other factors may have contributed to Noah’s stumbling?

*<http://enduringword.com/commentaries/0109.htm>

Let's Try This Again, Shall We?

LOGOS

Genesis 9–11; 2 Pet. 3:3, 4

God's Response to the Flood (Gen. 9:1–17)

Genesis 9:1–17 records God's "closing remarks" after the cataclysmic events that He ordained reached their conclusion. Immediately we see differences between this new beginning and the *original* beginning in the Garden of Eden. No longer did humanity simply have dominion over all living things; now all living things were to experience "fear . . . and . . . dread" (Gen. 9:2, NKJV) in response to humanity's presence. Rather than a diet of green things alone (1:29), humankind was now allowed to consume "every moving thing that lives" (9:3, NKJV). God's instructions went on to encompass the way in which to consume meat (verses 4, 5), His respect for human life (verses 5, 6), and an echo of His Edenic responsibility to populate the earth (verse 7).

Verses 8–17 outline the Noahic Covenant, in which God promises never again to destroy the earth by flood. The

**This "new" world was
almost immediately turned
upside-down.**

sign of this covenant is the rainbow, a beautiful visual reminder of God's promise: "It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is

between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh" (verses 14, 15, NKJV). Truly, in this unconditional promise, God proved His mercy and love for His creation in unquestionable terms.

Humanity's First Response (Gen. 9:18–29)

In response to this covenant, the Bible records no promise of obedience from Noah and his family. Instead, we see that Noah immediately planted a vineyard and got drunk on the fruits of his labor (verses 19, 20). His son Ham (the father of Canaan) saw him lying naked in his tent and told his two brothers about it. And thus, just as with the Fall in the Garden of Eden, this "new" world was almost immediately turned upside-down. Noah meted out curses and blessings upon his three sons, and the first etchings of tribal battle lines were formed.

A Towering Mistake (Gen. 11:1–9)

We must assume that for some years Noah's descendants lived together in rela-

tive harmony, because the Bible tells us they journeyed from the east together. But just as in the Garden of Eden, humans grew discontent with their lives. When they reached a plain in the land of Shinar, they decided to build a city with “‘a tower whose top is in the heavens; . . . lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth’ ” (11:4, NKJV).

Buried in this statement lies an unstated mistrust of God's promises—a mistrust that could have taken root only after a falling away from His presence. To keep the people from becoming overly self-reliant or powerful, God came down and confused their languages, which had, until this point, been the same. This caused work on the Tower of Babel to cease and contributed to the dispersing of peoples “over the face of all the earth” (verse 8, NKJV). Again, humanity's sinful designs were thwarted—but how long would it be until the next outbreak of rebellion?

The Beginnings of a Nation (Gen. 11:10–32)

Here, in the middle of such a bleak picture of human depravity, we come to a passage pointing to hope. The Bible lists Shem's descendants again, this time with a meticulous detail that speaks of the writer's intent. By verse 23, the names become familiar: Nahor, Terah, and finally, Abram. Reading the last verses of this chapter carefully, we see the kindness present in the heart of Terah, Abram's father, in that he adopted his grandson, Lot, after his father's death. Even if Abram didn't grow up knowing God personally, he may have had a good example of human dignity in his earthly father. He also may have understood the idea of relocation from his father, who resettled the whole family in the land of Canaan before he died. These small details give us hints into the way God prepared Abram for the life He had planned. Even before we sense God's presence, His Spirit is actively working to mold us for the service God has in store. What a refreshing glimpse into the wisdom of our Savior! What a joy to see Him not only on the “defensive,” cleaning up the messes humans made of their lives, but also on the “offensive,” laying the framework for the future of a man who would become the father of the nation into which would be born the Messiah!

REACT

1. What do the sins of Adam and Eve in the Garden, the people before the Flood, Noah and his children soon after the Flood, and the people at the Tower of Babel all have in common?

2. How does this commonality affect today's society, today's church, and your life in particular?

3. Read 2 Peter 3:3, 4. Sinful attitudes will be prevalent until the last days of this earth. How can you defend yourself against the attitude that brought the downfall of so many people in the early days of earth's history?

Babel Constructors Still Exist

TESTIMONY

Ps. 33:10, 11; Matt. 24:38, 39

The schemes of the Babel builders ended in shame and defeat. The monument to their pride became the memorial of their folly. Yet people today 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.

There are tower builders in our time. Infidels construct their theories from the supposed deductions of science and reject the revealed Word of God. They presume to pass sentence upon God's moral government; they despise His law and boast of the sufficiency of human reason.

In the professedly Christian world many turn away from the plain teachings of the Bible and build up a creed from human speculations and pleasing fables, and they point to their tower as a way to climb up to heaven. People hang with admiration upon the lips of eloquence while it teaches that the transgressor shall not die, that salvation may be secured without obedience to the law of God. If the professed

**There are tower builders in
our time.**

followers of Christ would accept God's standard, it would bring them into unity; but so long as human wisdom is exalted above his Holy Word, there will be divisions and dissension. The existing confusion of con-

flicting creeds and sects is fitly represented by the term *Babylon*, which prophecy applies to the world-loving churches of the last days. Many seek to make a heaven for themselves by obtaining riches and power. They "speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily" (Psalm 73:8), trampling upon human rights and disregarding divine authority.

"The time of God's investigation is at hand. The Most High will come down to see that which the children of men have builded. His sovereign power will be revealed; the works of human pride will be laid low. 'The Lord looketh from heaven; He beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of His habitation He looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth.' 'The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations.' Psalm 33:10, 11, 13, 14."*

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 124.

How to Master a Lesson

HOW-TO

2 Pet. 3:3, 4

As we look at Genesis 9-11, there are five important steps we need to follow to master the lessons God tries to teach us.

1. Remember to put God first. One of the first things Noah did after exiting the ark was to build an altar to God. Likewise, it should be our first thought and act to give our offerings of thanks to God. "Every manifestation of His mercy and love toward us should be gratefully acknowledged, both by acts of devotion and by gifts to His cause."*

2. Look for the tokens of God's promises. Just as God placed the rainbow in the sky as a promise to the post-Flood inhabitants, so God has given us "exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet. 1:4, NKJV).

3. Don't use the blessings of God as a curse by loving gifts more than the Giver or by making wrong use of them. When we place the blessings of health, money, education, career, or any other blessing before or in place of God or use them in a selfish or self-centered way, then these gifts become a curse to us instead of a blessing.

4. Ask God to guide your mind so that His Word will be the foundation of and guide for everything in your life. Just like the builders of the Tower of Babel, if we seek our own way, it will lead to confusion, but if we allow God's truth to illumine our minds and in loving faith follow the direction given in His Word, we will have "a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path" (Ps. 119:105, NKJV).

If we seek our own way, it will lead to confusion.

5. Allow God to separate you from that which might prevent you from learning the lesson. God instructed Abram to leave his family and friends and go to the land of Canaan because God knew that their heathen influence would be counterproductive to the lesson that He needed to teach Abram. Likewise, we too must be open to God's attempts to separate us from the people or things in our lives that might prevent Him from doing the work He needs to do.

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*Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 105.

Towers and Promises

OPINION

Gen. 9:11-17; 11:1-9; Prov. 3:5; Acts 2:39

God promised humankind that He would not destroy the earth with a flood again. He even placed a covenant between Him and humanity, signifying His true and sincere promise that there shall be no more floods that shall destroy the earth. But why did the people who built the Tower of Babel insist on building a tower that could reach the heavens? What drove them to such action?

It is not the character of God to lie to His people and make a promise that He had no intention of keeping. God's promises are true and sincere. So His promise that there will be no more floods to destroy the earth is all true. Yet, these people did not believe Him and kept on relying on their own strength to secure their safety. "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."* They believed that the tower was the answer to their need for safety.

Humanity has always feared the unknown.

In other words, these people did not trust the Lord. Instead they trusted their own efforts and understanding. Trusting in their own efforts, they were headed for their own destruction.

Humanity has always feared the unknown. And sometimes, even the sincerest promise was ignored and forgotten because of that growing fear inside our minds. Relationships were shattered because of distrusts and doubts. People began to take promises as mere words and kept on breaking them. But God is much different from humans. He means what He says, and you can count on every word that He speaks. If God's people put their trust in the Almighty God, they will not be anxious for whatever lies ahead of them. God promised that He will never let His children go astray, and that His "rod and . . . staff [will] comfort [them]" (Ps. 23:4, KJV).

The events that transpired with the Babel builders are lessons for us not to trust on our own strength, or with any other earthly things, material or immaterial. Otherwise, these will lead us to idolatry, and we will lose a good relationship that God holds dear.

REACT

1. What promises of God can you remember that have had a great impact on your life?
2. How did this change your relationship with Him and with other people?

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 119.

I Did It My Way

EXPLORATION

Rom. 6:16

If you ask most Christians to define sin, they will most often tell you that sin is separation from God. Sometimes people sin by blatantly disobeying God. But it also is possible to sin by acting as if God is irrelevant. We can see such a situation in Noah's efforts to "improve" the fruit of the vine so he could use it to alter a decision that has since had many negative consequences. And then, of course, there are the inhabitants of Babel and their quest for a path to heaven that bypassed God. Let us not bypass God, but consult Him for His will in all areas of our lives.

CONSIDER

- Sketching from memory persons or events that influenced important life choices or decisions you made, for good or ill. How do these sketches make you feel? How does how you feel now compare or contrast with how you felt then? Contrast the good decisions with the bad decisions.
- Making a specific plan for bringing God into the decision-making process of your daily life, particularly if you feel that many of your choices displease or ignore Him.
- Choosing a biblical text dealing with sin (Rom. 3:23, for example) and paraphrasing it in such a way that it makes sense to someone who may not be grounded in Christian doctrine.
- Listening to a variety of music and noticing how each affects your emotions, thought processes, and most noticeably, your decision-making faculties. What steps can you take to ensure that the music you acquaint yourself with leads to positive emotions/thought processes?
- Renting the recently released film *Supersize Me*, in which director Morgan Spurlock attempts to live on fast food for a month. How did it make him feel in the short term? The long term? What parallels exist between this film and your experience with sin?
- Writing a paragraph analyzing a decision you have made with or without taking God into account. What were the results? Why?

CONNECT

Romans 3:12–18.

Patriarchs and Prophets, chaps. 7, 8.

The man Abram



“He believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6, NKJV).

God's Friend

INTRODUCTION

2 Chron. 20:7

You have been living 75 years with your family in a comfortable, wealthy, and fertile place. During this time, you have had a lot of friends, and everything in your life is great. Then, one day, God appears to you and asks you to leave it all behind and go to an unknown place, where you will be blessed.

Young people enjoy traveling and seeing new places, like my younger brother, Samuel, who will be back soon from Florence, Italy, after a year as a student missionary in Villa Aurora. But Abram, "father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5, NKJV), was an old man with a whole life in Ur of the Chaldees. He was not 23 years old like my brother, who has wished for many years that he could travel and be a missionary. Even so, Abram made a leap of faith and decided to obey God by going to Canaan. He had so much faith that he's called a friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7), and his life is mentioned in the seventh chapter of Acts.

The life of the father and founder of Israel is so important that even when Jehovah communicated with Moses, the Lord identifies Himself as "the God of Abraham" (Exod. 3:6, NKJV). God made a very special call for him and chose him to be the father of an entire nation, through which the Savior of this world would come.

**We can see it on the news
channel every day.**

The Bible is impartial and presents both the positive and the negative aspects of Abram's life. First, he accepts the call of God. Then he hides part of the truth from Pharaoh in order to save his own life but risks his wife's honor. After that Abram shows he has a great heart by giving the best land to his nephew Lot. Later, remembering the divine promise of generations of descendants, he tries to help God with the problem of his wife's barrenness and procreates Ishmael with Hagar, who was Sarah's maid. Unfortunately, this act has carried sad and tragic consequences to the descendants of his children, and we can see it on the news channel every day.

But, continuing the history of this patriarch, when God asks him for the life of Isaac, he obeys Him. This is not about changing his place of residence. We are talking about killing his only beloved son. How could he have so much faith? Could we be called "friends of God," as he was? The intimate communion of Abram with God in the middle of his life will be the subject of study for this week.

Journey of Faith

LOGOS

Gen. 11:27–15:21

"He believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6, NKJV).

One of the most amazing concepts I believe is how God uses us everyday humans who place our faith in Him to help complete His incredible plan of salvation. One of the most telling examples of this concept is demonstrated in the life of Abram. Abram was 75 years old when he left behind his home, his familiar surroundings, and the people he had grown to know. What's more, he had no idea of where he was going (Heb. 11:8). What would make someone uproot their family and set out into the unknown? This week's lesson highlights Abram's journey of faith.

The Bible tells us that God approached Abram and requested that he pack up and leave to "a land that I will show you" (12:1, NKJV). What a request! But God did not just ask Abram to leave—He gave him a promise along with it. He tells Abram that he will be moving so that God can make a great nation out of him and bless him and make his name great.

To partner with God required Abram to have faith that God can do and will do what He has promised to do.

Abram's faith soon gets put to the test. A famine sweeps through the

land, forcing him to take his family into Egypt looking for food. The Bible tells us that as they approached Egypt, fear began to grip Abram's heart. He was fearful of the Egyptians killing him in order to take his wife, Sarai. Instead of trusting that God's plan was sufficient to provide for his concerns, he decides to take matters into his own hands. He falters on his journey as fear overcomes his faith. The end result of his decision was a negative situation for everybody involved. Not only did it hurt him to lose his wife and hurt Sarai to lose her husband, but Pharaoh endured the displeasure of God for taking the future mother of the children of Israel as his own wife. Abram did not let fear become the rule of his life though. He soon shows that his faith in God has returned.

A group of kings attacked the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot, who had cast his tent toward Sodom, gets captured when the invading armies carry off the spoils of their victory. When Abram hears of the fate of his nephew, he wastes no time in organizing his men and setting out to retrieve him. Abraham and 318 of his men pursue these kings and defeat them in a surprise attack. When the king of Sodom sees Abram returning with all that had been taken from them, you can imagine that

**He decides to take matters
into his own hands.**

he was more than impressed. Abram, however, refuses to accept the credit for the incredible victory. He makes sure that all understand that the victory and the glory was the Lord's. Abram's faith once again is evidenced in action. This act of faith, however, has the opposite effect of his deception in Egypt. Because of his faith people were blessed and God was glorified. Knowing God is with you allows you to disregard the odds as Abram did and simply do what is right. "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31, NIV).

The next stage in Abram's journey is the fulfillment of the promise that he would be the father of a great nation. Now, Abram was already 75 years old when he left his homeland. By this time Sarai was well past birthing age; but even had she been young enough, they had not been able to have children for their entire marriage. Sarai was unable to become pregnant. Abram had plenty of reason to question the "how" of God's promise. But since Abram had given himself fully to the Lord, he did not question. When God told him that he would have a child with Sarai, he simply believed. The Bible says that God saw this belief and counted it to him as righteousness. Righteousness is not something that we can attain by ourselves.

Abram's testimony once again reiterates the fact that it is Christ who covers you with His righteousness when you put your faith in Him. Faith is more than an idea you have in your head. Faith moves you, galvanizes you into action, shapes your decision making, and ultimately leads to righteousness. We can see in Abram's life what a difference it makes to put one's faith in God and to put one's faith in what seems right to us and in our own pitiful human devices.

Abram's journey of faith gives us so many reasons to have hope. This hope comes because we can see in Abram's experience that God's promises can be counted on. We have reason to take action when God asks something of us because we know that He has a plan that has been unfolding since the foundation of this world.

What is more is that our part in that plan is not only important but is that which is most fulfilling for both us and those in our sphere of influence. How incredible the thought that we do not have to be stressed out regarding the direction our lives should take. God has a plan for you just as He did for Abram, and your faith will decide how that plan will unfold.

REACT

1. What has God promised you?
2. What does your life say about where your faith is?

Get Thee Out!

TESTIMONY

Jer. 29:11; Heb. 11:9

It was significant that Abram walked away from his surroundings and influences. Getting out was beneficial for several reasons:

- He would be away from the seductive influences of friends and family, who would easily lead him away from the true knowledge of God and devotion to Him.
- It was to awake in him the need that he has for God's help. Dependence on God could be born in him only when a need was aroused in him. With his people around him—his kindred and family—it would be easy to think that God's hand was not in his life.
- A prayer life would be rekindled and a closer connection would be established. Abram set up altars wherever he went because he needed the hand of God in all he undertook. This helped to strengthen his relationship with God and enrich his prayer life.
- The experience would build up faith. "Abraham could not explain the leadings of Providence; he had not realized his expectations; but he held fast the promise, 'I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.' With

earnest prayer he considered how to preserve the life of his people and his flocks, but he would not allow circumstances to shake his faith in God's word."*

Abram set up altars wherever he went.

- He would form a closer link with God. Only with getting out can a closer tie with God be developed.

Abram's calling is a lesson to all who would have a relationship with God. They must leave, they must get out, they must come apart from their influences into a relationship with God and a closer walk with Him. They must separate themselves from the evil influences of sin, friends, and family alike. They should never look behind on possessions or wealth. They must walk forward into the unknown and follow the leadings of God, who is faithful.

REACT

1. What are the influences around you?
2. What are the things you need to walk away from to serve God more fully and without interruptions?
3. If God asked you to leave a career you loved, a job you cherished, or a dream that for so long you have dreamed, what would your reaction be?

*Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 129.

If You Have a Question, Ask

EVIDENCE

Gen. 15:2–6

After reading the key text, the most likely question to be asked could be: Why did Abram doubt God's promise? In Genesis 12:2, 3, God made a promise to Abram for the first time, but it seems as if somehow Abram didn't want to talk about it—maybe because the context of that conversation between God and Abram was focused on where he had to go and not on the promise itself. Abram was probably more worried about leaving right away and the logistics of the long trip through foreign cities, so he didn't want to start a discussion about that.

It seems that on the trip Abram had a lot of time to think about what God told him in Genesis 12:2, 3 just before leaving Haran. As soon as he began to reflect on it, the big question began to appear. The more he tried to understand, the bigger the question became, so one day he decided to ask God, and here is the lesson God wanted to teach him. One of the most important lessons found in Genesis is that God's logic is not the same as ours. And Abram needed to learn how to trust Him. God also wanted to let us know that we can't spend our lives wondering about what His plans for us are, but we need to know the plan in order to follow it. We need to ask Him; that's why after Abram asks God, God explains to him every detail of that promise.

**Abram needed to learn
how to trust Him.**

We may think that God's plans are always clear as water. Well, they are not, but through these verses God lets us know that if we have questions about His plans for us, the only thing we have to do is ask, and He will answer. So the answer to that first question, Why did Abram doubt God's promise? is that he didn't doubt it. Abram wanted to follow God's plans, and he needed an explanation of that plan to know how to follow it. He did believe the Lord, and God credited it to him as righteousness.

REACT

1. If Abram doubted, does that mean he didn't trust God? Explain your answer.
2. If Abram had never asked the question, would God still have fulfilled that promise?
3. What is the difference between faith and trust?

There Is a Greater Plan

HOW-TO

Genesis 15

Can you see the desperation of a mother without food for her children? Imagine the suffering of a father who is separated from his family because it seems to be the only alternative for a better future. Would you believe it's possible, under these circumstances, to dream of a college degree for your children?

This happened to Alfredo and Maria, who in the middle of a crisis asked for the guidance of God and decided to trust in His wisdom and resources. They left their country to find a better future, coming across obstacles in their path, but at the same time they viewed these things as clear signs of the presence of God. They struggled, but above all, they trusted that the promise expressed in Genesis 15:1 would be carried out. Nevertheless it was impossible to stop questioning how they would give their daughters the education that they dreamed of when their income was low, time was scarce, and tuition was high. In the middle of their desperation, they asked the Lord how it would be possible for them to achieve their dream.

**They struggled, but above
all, they trusted.**

Under these circumstances it's easy to question God and even to doubt His promises because it seems impossible to be carried out under the harshness of the reality. It is in moments like these when we

should do the following:

1. Recognize our needs. Just as when Abram told God that he didn't have any descendants to fulfill the promise, we should recognize that most of the time we don't have the means for the promises to be realized. Nevertheless, God will provide them.

2. Speak with God. "Abram said, 'O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?'" (Gen. 15:2, NIV). Tell God your desires and what you have, and ask Him to intervene in order to achieve His purpose.

3. Believe in the promises of God. "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (verse 6, NIV).

4. Don't forget that He has a greater plan. God offers us the same promise that He gave Abram: " 'Do not be afraid. . . I am your shield, your very great reward' " (verse 1, NIV). We should have the certainty that God's plan for our life is greater.

God's promises are fulfilled. Just as Abraham was the father of multitudes, Alfredo and Maria's daughters now have successful careers.

Abram, an Example of Conviction

OPINION

Gen. 15:5, 6

As a man, Abram was sometimes blind to the blessings he was receiving; his eyes were closed to the obvious, in that he doubted the promises God had given to him, despite the clear evidence of their fulfillment. He even came to the point that he questioned the word of God when he asked, "What can you give me since I remain childless?" It is clear that he had in mind only the human possibilities. According to him, the promise of being the "father of the nations" could not possibly be fulfilled because he did not have even one child. This could be considered a natural reaction because, according to the order of things on earth, it was perfectly logical. But God's providence is above mere logic.

In His eternal sympathy and divine patience, God explained things to Abram using His book par excellence: nature. When our eyes are earthbound, what could be more solid and irrefutable than the power of God majestically displayed in the heavens? "He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'" (Gen. 15:5, NIV).

Then "Abram believed the Lord" (verse 6, NIV). As human beings we have this foolish need to be reminded of divine promises and blessings even though they are so clearly evident. Now and then we find ourselves demanding answers and options of God. He patiently listens and somehow He answers; sometimes He speaks, sometimes He sings, sometimes He draws—sometimes He lets us think more.

How great it would be to have the privilege of listening to the divine Comforter whispering to us every time we question this life and its storms! And what an honor it would be if, as happened to Abram, God would come right here next to us to encourage us to go on, reminding us of the promises of heavenly success. Let's not fix our eyes to the earth. God always gives us the answers one way or another.

**Let's not fix our eyes to the
earth.**

REACT

1. Do we ever have the right to question God and the way He acts? Explain your answer.
2. Is disbelief part of our human nature? Why or why not?

The Legacy of the Faithful Example

EXPLORATION

Heb. 11:8–10, 39–12:2

CONCLUDE

As with Abram, the success of our faith journey depends in part on our measure of faith. The journey demands that we trust God's promises and His plans, especially when we cannot see the path ahead. Building our friendship with God requires that we exercise the legacy of faith Abram has bequeathed to us. Through his example, we are encouraged to grow in trust as we walk the journey ahead; and it is now our duty to ensure that those who follow us, as we have followed Abram, will witness our faithfulness.

CONSIDER

- Drawing a map called "My Journey of Faith." Define faith in your own words, based on your own experiences. Use the letters A and T as your starting and finishing points, respectively. Draw the map using the letters B through S as rest spots along the journey from A to T. Based on your definition of faith and your experience, highlight the spot where you think you are now. By each rest spot, write a Bible text that can help you to move to the next rest spot. Use this map with the Bible texts as a guide to help you not only to increase your faith but also to exercise it.
- Starting a journal of faith. Continue throughout the new year. Write the experience you have each day with faithfulness or faithlessness. On December 31, 2007, reread your entries from the beginning to assess how you have grown or shrunk.
- Joining a hospital ministry. Read the Bible or some other inspiring book with the patients and pray with them for faith in their time of illness.
- Composing a song about either the importance of faith in serving God or your journey of faith. Write it in such a way that people will see faith through your eyes.

CONNECT

Hebrews 11–12:2.

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 12.

Morris L. Venden, *Faith That Works*.

Faith and Frailty



“Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son” (Gen. 18:14, NKJV).

The World's Greatest Tightrope Walker

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 11:6

It was a bright, clear morning. A large crowd had gathered at Niagara Falls to see the famous Blondin walk over it on a tightrope. The sun glistened on the cascading torrent as it rushed over the precipice. The world's greatest tightrope walker briefly tested the taut strand that reached across to the opposite bank. Then he took his long pole and, balancing himself expertly, started across. The crowd followed every movement tensely. Step by step he moved forward. The people on the shore reacted nervously to every sharp motion of the balancing pole. But their fears and forebodings were unnecessary. The great Blondin not only went across safely but returned as well.

Turning to the audience, he then made a sensational offer. He would cross the falls again, this time with someone on his back. Who was willing to go? No one rushed forward to accept the offer. Picking out a man at random, Blondin asked, "Do you believe that I am able to carry you across?"

"Yes, sir," came the unhesitating reply.

"Well, then, let's go," Blondin urged.

"Not on your life!"—and the man withdrew into the crowd.

**Many in that crowd believed
that Blondin could do it.**

And so it went. One after another expressed great confidence in the tightrope walker, but no one would agree to let Blondin take him across. Finally, a young fellow moved toward the front of the crowd. Blondin repeated his question: "Do you believe I can carry you across safely?"

"Yes, I do."

"Are you willing to let me?"

"As a matter of fact, I am." The young man climbed onto the expert's back. Blondin stepped onto the rope, paused momentarily, then moved across the falls without difficulty.

Many in that crowd believed Blondin could do it. But only one was willing to trust him. This is what faith is all about: not only believing that God can carry us safely across the cascading torrents of life, but also being willing to trust Him to do it.

This week our study continues with the spiritual and geographical journeys of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and Lot—a study that exemplifies both their faith and their frailties juxtaposed against a world steeped in sin and spiritual degradation.

What's Too Hard for God?

EVIDENCE

Gen. 18:14

The Christian faith—no matter how frail—can defy science. While science has yet to ascertain a precise method of predicting women's reproductive life span, for most women, menopause occurs around age 50 or 51. The faith of a 100-year-old man and the laughing doubting belief of his 90-year-old wife, however, proved God can defy science, for "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14, NKJV).

After waiting 25 years, now well beyond menopause, a 90-year-old woman received a promise from the Lord that she would give birth to the divinely promised son (Gen. 18:12). Sarah laughed. Wouldn't you?

God demonstrates that He is El-Shaddai—the Almighty God, for whom nothing is too hard. "Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!" (Ps. 144:15, NKJV). His boundless resources are available to others just as they were to Sarah and Abraham.

Their story teaches the lesson of relying upon God's Word without any outward evidence of its fulfillment. "Many are still tested as was Abraham. . . . They may be required

**"Many are still tested as
was Abraham."**

to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor, to leave congenial and profitable associations, . . . to enter upon what appears to be only a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice."¹ God "brings them into positions that test their character and reveal defects and weaknesses that have been hidden from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him; for He is their only help and safeguard."²

You might be tempted to doubt, but if you trust, you will rejoice when your frailty meets faith and God's promises become reality. Your faithful stance is an incontestable argument that God leads in ways we do not understand. But He never forgets His promises to those who love Him. "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?"

REACT

1. What situation have you determined is too hard for God?
2. Have the delays been a test of your faith? Are you passing the test?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 126, 127.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 130.

Strengths and Weaknesses

LOGOS

Gen. 16:1–19:38

Faith (Gen. 11:27–15:21)

Genesis 11:27–15:21 introduces us to Abram, soon to be called Abraham, a man of faith. In referring to Abraham's faith in Romans 4:18–22, Paul outlines the substance of this faith. It enabled Abraham to trust God's Word in spite of the physical evidence that appeared to contradict His promises. Faith is not wishful day-dreaming. As used here, it suggests the idea of firmness and stability. It is grounded in the faithfulness of God (Ps. 9:10), who can be trusted to keep His promises. Faith also expresses assurance and certainty. As we reach Genesis 16, it is obvious that for Abraham, faith equaled acceptance of God's promise of a son.

Frailty (Gen. 16:1–16)

Many times the trial of faith reveals the frailties of humanity. Abram, succumbing to the suggestions of Sarai's frustration in not realizing the promise after 24 years of waiting, agrees to her solution—namely, that of using Hagar as a surrogate mother to fulfill the promise (Gen. 16:1–4).

In Christ, the "priceless price" has been paid.

What a paradox: a man of such strong faith so prone to frailty.

"Faith may be genuine and yet prove to be weak in moments of stress and perplexity."* We, like Abram and Sarai, sometimes believe that we can assist God in accomplishing His Sovereign will. However, frequently unbeknown to us, God's apparent delay is one of the methods He uses to strengthen our weak and halting faith. What we may consider as impossibilities, God uses to enrich our lives, to develop spiritual growth, and to provide help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). This husband and wife faltered and exhibited severe lapses in judgment. Their weaknesses, however, should not be used as excuses for our own foibles, but they should serve to encourage us as we also wait for God to manifest Himself in accomplishing His promises in our lives.

Fall (Gen. 18:1–19:38)

In Chapter 17 Abram is given a new name: " 'Your name shall be Abraham' " (Gen. 17:5, NKJV), and a renewed covenant, which is then sealed with the introduction of circumcision. Here we come face to face with a God who will not be deterred from fulfilling His promises.

Genesis 18:1–19:38 reveals a world steeped in rebellion against God. These verses paint a picture of evil in its most sordid details. Words fail to portray the depths of sensuality, immorality, and hedonism. The prophet Ezekiel sums up the lifestyle practiced by the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah by succinctly stating that pride, prosperity, and idleness were their trademarks (Ezek. 16:49). They had lost the knowledge of the true and living God, and now they were caught in an endless circle of sin, which controlled them to such an extent that not even warnings brought by heavenly beings had any effect. Yet, despite His intention, there are clear overtones of God's willingness to save. Not even humanity's attempt to ignore God's repeated calls to repentance can curtail His interest in the salvation of His created beings.

Forgiveness (Gen. 18:23–32)

Abraham appears in this section in a new role. Previously we saw him as a man of faith and obedience, though assailed by failures and defects of character. But now another portrait emerges—that of an intercessor. He is concerned about the salvation of the citizens in Sodom and Gomorrah, especially for Lot and his family. What follows is an intriguing and engaging conversation between Abraham and God, one that amazes us. On one hand it shows us Abraham's persistence, and on the other, God's willingness to listen and respond. Abraham makes six appeals to God for mercy upon those righteous within the city, if they could be found (Gen. 18:32). This conversation is riveting! Abraham respectfully but forcefully presents his requests to God. What a picture of persistence and perseverance, matched by patience and mercy. Man can never equal God in His work of intercession for sinners. Still, the time comes when refusal to accept God's forgiveness leads to the point of no return: the fate suffered by Sodom and Gomorrah.

God takes seriously our prayers on behalf of others. He listens carefully and intently to our intercessions, and He responds, for He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV). The Cross unequivocally shows His love. No one can honestly dispute God's love for His erring children. However, as Sodom and Gomorrah tragically demonstrated, God's love, mercy, and forgiveness can be rejected. In our spiritual journey we will encounter difficulties, and oftentimes we may stumble and fall, as did Abraham, but nothing is too hard for the Lord. In Christ, the “priceless price” has been paid, and no one who accepts and values this transaction will be lost.

REACT

Why didn't the Lord intervene and prevent Abram from following Sarai's suggestion?

**The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 317.

Standing Up for the Low Down

TESTIMONY

Gen. 18:17-33

"Love for perishing souls inspired Abraham's prayer. While he loathed the sins of that corrupt city, he desired that the sinners might be saved. His deep interest for Sodom shows the anxiety that we should feel for the impenitent. We should cherish hatred of sin, but pity and love for the sinner. 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. With an antagonism to evil such as can

exist only in a nature spotlessly pure, Christ manifested toward the sinner a love which infinite goodness alone could conceive. In the agonies of the crucifixion, Himself burdened with the awful weight of

**"We should cherish hatred
of sin."**

the sins of the whole world, He prayed for His revilers and murderers, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' Luke 23:34."*

That is what we should aspire to do: to see the sin and immorality of an individual and love him or her in spite of it. We are never to be comfortable with sin or condone it. We are, however, to see the need of the person as Christ does with us. We are to work to bring the sinner out of darkness and into the marvelous light of the gospel. We are not to isolate ourselves from those who need the very thing that spared us from a dead-end existence.

REACT

1. How does Abraham serve as an example for us living in a world of corruption and perversion?
2. Read Luke 23:34. Are you able to separate the sin from the sinner and see someone who needs love?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 140.

Handling Pride and Sensuality

HOW-TO

John 14:6; Rom. 8:3, 4, 9

When we, as sinners, understand our need for Jesus Christ and how we are separated from God and the things of God because of our "sin nature," we can then begin to understand the solution to pride and sensuality. Our very sinful nature hates the things of God and loves the pleasures of this world (Rom. 8:6-8). The Bible says, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5, NKJV).

We are controlled by our sinful nature from the very start, and we are powerless to do anything about it on our own! (Rom. 7:5, 18). Housed in our sinful natures are pride and sensuality, which cut us off from God and conform us to the things of this world. God hates pride and all kinds of evil behavior (Prov. 8:13). He knows that our desire is to do good, but on our own, we are powerless to carry it out! (Rom. 7:18).

So, how do we deal with pride and sensuality in a real sense? Are we bound to this world with no hope? God forbid! Consider these points:

**We are controlled by our
sinful nature from the very
start.**

1. Know that all of your solutions are housed in Jesus Christ. It all starts here (John 14:6). By knowing where to begin, you start your journey with the One who can guide you through the processes necessary to answer all the "how to's."

2. Know that your power to deal with your sinful nature (which includes pride and sensuality) is derived from the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:3, 4, 9). Just as food is necessary to fuel the body, one needs a power source for strength to make it through the spiritual journey.

3. Allow your mind to be renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit so that you set your mind on things above, not on earthly things (Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:2). In its carnal state, your mind is on the things of this life, not on heavenly things.

4. By the grace of God, just say no to ungodliness and worldly passions (Titus 2:12). God's grace fills in the helplessness of humankind!

REACT

1. What is the difference between sin as an act and our sinful nature?
2. In what respects is sin hereditary?

Remember Lot's Wife

OPINION

Luke 17:28–32

The morning of September 11, 2001, was extraordinarily beautiful. Its pleasant temperatures and clear blue skies seemed to portend a day of peace and serenity. Yet, before 9:00 A.M., our world was irrevocably changed. The calamity of 9-11 is eerily reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The pen of inspiration tells us that on the day of destruction "The bright rays of the morning seemed to speak only prosperity and peace to the cities of the plain. . . . Suddenly and unexpectedly . . . the tempest broke."¹

Some view 9-11 as an expression of God's judgment; some as the sinister activity of a misguided subset of society. Regardless of how you view that day, it serves as a poignant reminder that we are living in the last days.

Jesus relates the time of Lot to the last days. He says, "'People went about their daily business—eating and drinking, buying and selling, farming and building—until the morning Lot left Sodom.

Then fire and burning sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all' " (Luke 17:28, 29, NLT).

How can we forget Lot's wife? At that time she was experiencing her

She was experiencing her personal 9-11.

personal 9-11. However, *Patriarchs and Prophets* states, "While her body was upon the plain, her heart clung to Sodom, and she perished with it."²

Before the destruction of Sodom "there was a coming out, a decided separation from the wicked, an escape for life. So it was in the days of Noah; so with Lot; so with the disciples prior to the destruction of Jerusalem; and so it will be in the last days. Again the voice of God is heard in a message of warning, bidding His people separate themselves from the prevailing iniquity."³

Because God loves us (Rev. 18:4), He always calls us out. Some He calls out of worldliness, others out of materialism. Still others He calls out of improper relationships and inappropriate entertainment. As He calls, remember Lot's wife.

REACT

1. What is it about Lot's wife that you think Jesus wants us to remember most? Explain your answer.

2. Out of what is God calling you?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 162.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

Good News

EXPLORATION

Prov. 3:5; 2 Cor 5:7; Heb. 11:6; 1 John 5:14

CONCLUDE

Faith opens up a world of unimaginable possibilities. It is the key that pours out God's omnipotence in our behalf; but our faith does not have to be perfect for God to use it. As we learn to trust Him completely, He will strengthen our feeble faith and give us more faith than we ever dreamed of. God says, "My power is perfected in your weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). What good news that is!

CONSIDER

- Writing your prayer requests on sticky notes and placing them on the refrigerator or another visible spot. When God answers your prayer, record the answer and the date you received it on the same paper you wrote the prayer. Track your petitions for a month, asking God to teach you to trust Him.
- Standing in a line blindfolded with your friends. Throw yourself backwards toward the floor and wait for your friends to catch you. Take turns until all have tried it. Talk about how it feels to give up control and depend on others.
- Sharing with a friend three things you deem too hard for God to do in your life. Pray about those things, and ask God to show you His power.
- Setting up a prayer chain to intercede for someone who needs support. Bake cookies and include an anonymous note saying, "We're praying for you."
- Searching the news headlines and comparing the current world situation with the ancient Sodom and Gomorrah. How are we different, and how are we alike?
- Reading Hebrews 11:6. Meditate on how you can exercise your faith in ways that are pleasing to God.

CONNECT

Hebrews 11.

Bruce Wilkinson with Brian Smith, *Beyond Jabez: Expanding Your Borders*, chap. 5.

The Triumph of Faith



“ ‘Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me’ ” (Gen. 22:12, NKJV).

A Game of Questions

INTRODUCTION

1 Cor. 2:2

It was a clear, bright sunny day as four friends began their eight-hour car trip from San Francisco to southern California.

Along the way, amid the usual chatter of plans and memories, one suggested that they play a conversational game of questions—going around the car and communicating only with questions. All in the car agreed to play, and such is how the game started. Beginning lightheartedly, they first asked each other questions about the weather, favorite flavors of ice cream, musical preferences, and the typical “When are we going to get there?”

Gradually taking advantage of the opportunities that such a game provided, the friends’ discussion turned to juicier subjects. They began to ask each other about past relationships, families, personal struggles, future goals, and other personal dimensions. And as the questions deepened, they began to talk about the nature of friendship, love, life, meaning, and God. “What is a friend?” one asked. “How do we really know what we believe about God is true?” asked another.

**It was as if the darkness
outside the car had found
its way in.**

As the sun set and the little car continued to make its way south, it became clear that the plethora of questions was leading only to confusion and uncertainty. It was as if the darkness outside the car had found its way in, leaving the four helplessly wandering about and grasping for answers in their own minds—for their own lives.

In the darkness and the looming questions, it became apparent that the group needed some common ground to reference in order for any progress of understanding. If there were to be any light shed upon their searching, and if they were to find any satisfactory answers, they would have to find a meta-framework, a sort of image or ideal against which all their questions could be compared. Without such, the conversation and questioning only led them further into the abyss of uncertainty.

In an age in which a premium is placed on scientific inquiry, where we are bombarded by information and everybody seems to have their own set of questions and answers, it is certainly easy to get lost in the questions. In such a time, and perhaps more than ever, we need an ultimate framework with which to compare to keep us from getting lost. We also need a model: a life example with which to compare.

The Promised Heir

LOGOS

Gen. 20:1–25:10

“The Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him” (Gen. 21:1, 2, NKJV). Abraham named his son Isaac as the Lord commanded.

“The birth of Isaac, bringing, after a lifelong waiting, the fulfillment of their dearest hopes, filled the tents of Abraham and Sarah with gladness.”¹

The Test of Faith (Gen. 22:1–5)

“In the obedience of faith, Abraham had forsaken his native country—had turned away from the graves of his fathers and the home of his kindred. He had wandered as a stranger in the land of his inheritance. He had waited long for the birth of the promised heir. At the command of God he had sent away his son Ishmael. And now, when the child so long desired was entering upon manhood,

and the patriarch seemed able to discern the fruition of his hopes, a trial greater than all others was before him.”²

Isaac began to wonder about something important that was missing.

“Isaac was the light of [Abraham’s] home, the solace of his old age, above all else the inheritor of the promised blessing. . . . but

[Abraham] was commanded to shed the blood of that son with his own hand.”³

“God asked him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice—to kill him like a lamb, or a kid, or a calf, and burn him on an altar!”⁴

“Surely no greater test of faith and love ever came to any man. After waiting for years and years for this dear boy, . . . after loving him with all the intense devotion that an old man has for an only son, he was now asked to lay him on an altar and slay him!”⁵

Abraham “recalled the promise made nearly fifty years before, that his seed should be innumerable as the stars. If this promise was to be fulfilled through Isaac, how could he be put to death?”⁶

“Looking beyond that which was seen, Abraham grasped the divine word, ‘accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.’ (Hebrews 11:19).”⁷

The Lord’s Provision (Gen. 22:6–19)

On their way to the mountain, Isaac began to wonder about something impor-

tant that was missing for the offering service they would make. He asks his father, “ ‘The fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ ” (Gen. 22:7, NKJV). “The moment Abraham had dreaded most had come! Isaac must be told the awful truth.”⁸ Abraham replied, “ ‘God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering’ ”(verse 8, NKJV).

“Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood” (verse 9, NKJV). “Then, with trembling voice, Abraham unfolded to his son the divine message. It was with terror and amazement that Isaac learned his fate, but he offered no resistance. . . . he felt that he was honored in being called to give his life as an offering to God.”⁹

Abraham “lifts the knife to slay his son, when suddenly his arm is stayed. An angel of God calls to the patriarch out of heaven, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ He quickly answers, ‘Here am I.’ And again the voice is heard, ‘Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me.’

“Then Abraham saw ‘a ram caught in a thicket,’ and quickly bringing the new victim, he offered it ‘in the stead of his son.’ In his joy and gratitude, Abraham gave a new name to the sacred spot—‘Jehovah-jireh,’ ‘the Lord will provide.’

“On Mount Moriah, God again renewed His covenant, confirming with a solemn oath the blessing to Abraham and to his seed through all coming generations.”¹⁰

REACT

1. Do you recall in the past some “Isaac” that God required you to give up? Was it even yours after all?

2. Even though we may give up things that really weren’t ours, how does God look upon our sacrifice?

3. How would you respond to individuals who think that they have to give up a lot to be a Christian?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 146.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Arthur S. Maxwell, *The Bible Story*, vol. 1, p. 170.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 148.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

8. Maxwell, p. 172.

9. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 152.

10. *Ibid.*, pp.152, 153

Echoes of the Master Artist

TESTIMONY

Isa. 40:16

"There is no ground for the supposition that man was evolved, by slow degrees of development, from the lower forms of animal or vegetable life."¹

Scientists have said that humanity came from no maker, but from animals. Can we easily accept that argument? "Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have, however, led to supposed conflict between science and revelation."²

"God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27, NKJV). "The great Master Artist writes His name on all his created works, from the loftiest cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop upon the wall. They all declare his handiwork."³

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Heb. 11:3, NKJV). "The beauties of nature have a tongue that speaks to us without ceasing.

The open heart can be impressed with the love and glory of God, as seen in the works of His hand."⁴

"After the earth, with its teeming animal and vegetable life, had been called into existence, man, the

Can we easily accept that
argument?

crowning work of the Creator, . . . was brought upon the stage of action. . . .

"Though formed from the dust, Adam was 'the son of God.'"⁵

"For six thousand years [Satan] has wrought his will, filling the earth with woe, and causing grief throughout the universe."⁶

"O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20, NKJV).

No wonder God before and after redemption gave us His Sabbath as a reminder that we were created in His image and that Jesus Christ is our Savior. "The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (Rom. 16:20, NKJV).

1. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 29.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Nothing to Lose

EVIDENCE

Gen. 22:7, 8

My family used to attend services every week. The siblings each had their own little offering envelopes for the collections. During that time, my dad would give us each a quarter to put in those little envelopes to give to the church. Did we brothers and sisters actually give anything during the collection? It was my father who provided the money to give. Then again, once my dad gave me that quarter, it was technically mine to do with what I wanted.

In Genesis 22, God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his one and only son. Did Isaac really belong to Abraham? Actually no, since the entire earth and what is in it belong to the Lord (Ps. 24:1). However, God asked Abraham as if Isaac belonged to Abraham.

On his way up the mountain, Isaac asked “ ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ ” (Gen. 22:7, NKJV). At this time, did God provide a sacrifice? Yes! In the form of Isaac. Did Abraham provide anything at all? No! Remember again Psalm 24:1.

Abraham said that the Lord would provide a sacrifice or a lamb offering (Gen. 22:8). Nevertheless, it wasn't until Abraham lifted up his hand to sacrifice Isaac that God told him to stop and use the other sacrifice He was going to make available.

Isn't it amazing how God provided everything? In fact, that is one of His names: “The Lord will provide.” Abraham called the place of sacrifice Jehovah-jireh, translated, “the Lord will provide.”

Now how does this apply to us today? “Our Heavenly Father surrendered his beloved Son to the agonies of the crucifixion. . . . What greater proof can the Infinite One give us of His divine love and pity.”* Not only did He provide the sacrifice, He provided everything needed so the sacrifice would be complete, including the wood for the cross, the metal for the nails, and the people to make sure the deed was done. Did we humans have any part in this sacrifice? The answer is No! God may have used people to complete the task, but it was He who made sure all was done according to His will. He is not just the Starter and Finisher of our salvation, but the Author of the whole thing (Heb. 5:9). What an awesome God we have on our side!

How does this apply to us today?

**The Signs of the Times*, April 1, 1875.

How to Have Faith Beyond Reason

HOW-TO

Prov. 3:5, 6

God had promised Abraham a son, but Abraham was old and even Sarah was too old to bear a child. The element of doubt crept into Sarah's mind—she was too old to deliver a child. This made Sarah use her own reasoning, and she decided to give Hagar, her maidservant, to Abraham to continue his lineage. This would seem quite logical to a 100-year-old woman who had waited for 25 years for a son. Sarah might have thought that she was being reasonable with God, and that she was in some ways using human reasoning in fulfilling God's promise.

Now let us look at how Abraham reacted when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham could have thought, *Lord, You told me that you would make a great nation from my offspring but now You want him sacrificed.* He could have asked, "How could a nation come without a son?" But Abraham never questioned God and never put his own human reasoning into understanding God's promises. And so Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son at God's command.

This account tells us that faith is more important than human reasoning. Let us see the difference in Sarah's and Abraham's reasoning. Sarah's reasoning was based on a human point of view. Human reasoning should always keep in mind that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

Abraham's reasoning was based on keeping in mind that God is all-powerful, all-knowledgeable, is always there for us, and that God will always fulfill His promises. If God wanted Isaac to be sacrificed, so be it; but He would still make Abraham the father of many nations.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5, 6, NKJV).

REACT

1. Does God want us to reason out His promises? Explain your answer.
2. To what extent, if any, does God use human help in fulfilling His promises?
3. Why did Abraham not reason the same way as Sarah did?

Faith in the Dark

OPINION

Gen. 22:2

"Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good."¹

We all have trials and challenges in our lives. No one in this world is exempted from those painful challenges and perilous times. Even the great men and women of the Bible experienced it. The patriarch Abraham, in spite of his being obedient to God, experienced the greatest and biggest test of faith a man could ever imagine. God asked him to slay his son Isaac (a son that he had waited so long for) and burn him as an offering.

"Abraham's great act of faith stands like a pillar of light, illuminating the pathway of God's servants in all succeeding ages. Abraham did not seek to excuse himself from doing the will of God. During that three days' journey he had sufficient time to reason, and to doubt God, if he was disposed to doubt. He might have reasoned that the slaying of his son would cause him to be looked upon as a murderer, a second Cain; that it would cause his teaching to be rejected and despised; and thus destroy his power to do good to his fellow men. He might have pleaded that age should excuse him from obedience. But the patriarch did not take refuge in any of these excuses. Abraham was human; his passions and attachments were like ours; but he did not stop to question how the promise could be fulfilled if Isaac should be slain. He did not stay to reason with his aching heart. He knew that God is just and righteous in all His requirements, and he obeyed the command to the very letter."²

"Sometimes, we just cannot see what God has in mind."

"Sometimes, we just cannot see what God has in mind and life makes absolutely no sense at all. Everything seems dark and mysterious. That's exactly when we must trust in our loving God. . . . Isaiah reminds us, 'who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God' (Isa. 50:10, NIV)."³

1. *Education*, p. 253.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 153.

3. Ed Bulkley, *How Big Is Your God?* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1997), p. 30.

God Himself Will Provide the Lamb

EXPLORATION

Gen. 22:8; Acts 3:15, 16; 2 Tim. 1:12

CONCLUDE

Do you have faith God will provide? Abraham did. "‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ And the two of them went on together" (Gen. 22:8, NIV). Paul did. "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong" (Acts 3:16, NIV). Timothy did. "For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Tim. 1:12, NKJV). The Lamb is provided. Walk on with Him in the triumph of faith.

CONSIDER

- Role-playing the Abraham and Isaac story using Genesis 22 as the basis of a script. Use a real father and son duo in which the son is obviously tall enough or strong enough to physically overcome the father if he chose to do so. Present the role-play to an earliteen or adult Sabbath School.
- Singing "I Know Whom I Have Believed" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, number 511). This popular church hymn quotes 2 Timothy 1:12. If you do not have the hymnal, this hymn is also available at <http://www.musicanet.org/robokopp/usa/iknowhom.htm>.
- Interviewing some church members to learn how God has provided for them in times of great need.
- Thinking about and discussing with a friend what went through Abraham's mind when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac and as he and Isaac journeyed to the mountain where the sacrifice would be made. Use *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter 13, as a resource.
- Recording in a journal for one week times when you consciously trusted in God and demonstrated your faith that He would provide.
- Observing a natural environment and contemplating how God provides for the plants and animals that dwell there.

CONNECT

Genesis 22.

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap.13.

Clifford Goldstein, *God, Gödel, and Grace: A Philosophy of Faith*.

The Price of Duplicity



“ ‘Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you’ ”

(Gen. 28:15, NKJV).

Playing With Paint: Artistic Trickery

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 27:15, 16

Have you ever been the victim of artistic trickery? While enjoying the ambience of a new restaurant, you may have noticed across the room a doorway opening into a garden. Shrubs and flowers—and a tiny bird resting on the birdbath—may have invited you to step into the garden. On a wall near your table, you have studied chipped brickwork and trailing ivy—real enough to tempt not only the eyes but the fingers to verify their authenticity. The finger tips anticipate the unevenness of the brick's rough edges and the glossy smoothness of the ivy leaves. Experience cautions that these objects are not real, but the artist's skill argues otherwise.

Trompe l'oeil, a particularly imaginative form of art, has existed for more than two thousand years. The form was represented in the ruins of Pompeii, lost during the Dark Ages, and recovered by the Renaissance. *Trompe l'oeil* artists have painted three-dimensional objects and pastoral scenes on flat surfaces of palaces, places

**They wait for opportunities
to take advantage of another
person's trust or ignorance.**

of worship or business, and homes for centuries. The artist's design is to enhance space by simulating stained glass, domed ceilings, doors, windows, or natural settings, such as the sun or moon, trees, birds, or flowers. Business and

home owners may commission murals to hide unattractive features of the environment, to "create space" in cramped areas, or simply to add beauty.

In contrast to the constructive artistry of *trompe l'oeil* painters who share their talents with all who observe their work, duplicitous tricksters use their talents to deceive others. Combining actual and apparent realities, these schemers become sinister artists who hide their talents from public view. They wait for opportunities to take advantage of another person's trust or ignorance. Using their destructive talent, they lure the unwary into making unwise promises, bad business deals, or relationships that enhance only the schemer's resources. *Trompe l'oeil* painters use color, light, and texture to pleasantly trick the eye, to enhance the environment, but their art cautions the observer that the power of art is not always in what appears on the surface.

Like *trompe l'oeil* artists, identified by the unique characteristics of their art, schemers eventually are recognized by a different set of distinctive traits.

Tales From the Mountains of Seir

EVIDENCE

Gen. 27:27–29; Obadiah 17–21; Mark 3:8

Every mountain range has a story. For the Israelites, the Mountains of Seir told a story: of brothers, of betrayal, and the shallow, stinking sea of history that separates peoples. Fathers told their children about Jacob's battle with the angel. Obadiah looked at those mountains and foresaw that Judah would rise from the ashes of foreign invasion.

In recent years discoveries have affirmed the historical facts behind the stories of Esau and Jacob. The Nuzi Tablets, discovered near Kirkuk, Iraq, in 1926, confirm many of the customs found in Genesis. Dated roughly to the time of the Exodus (1600 to 1350 B.C.E.), they include legal means by which a birthright might be transferred between brothers.¹

For many years historians scoffed at the thought that the civilization of Edom could have any connection with Esau. Archeological digs in the Seir Mountains, however, have found evidence of a thriving Edomite civilization as early as the time of King David—the zenith for the children of Esau's brother, Israel. The site, called Khirbet-en-Nahas, yielded remains of a metal-working industry and a hunting scene—a reminder of Esau's favorite hobby (Gen. 25:27).²

**Genesis is more than
geography.**

The children of Esau, the Edomites, even play a peripheral role in the New Testament. Arguably, the most famous of Esau's descendants was Herod the Great, who built the lavish temple in Jerusalem and tried to destroy the infant Jesus. Later, the Edomites—known in Jesus' day as Idumeans—joined the Jewish revolt of 70 C.E. only to see their civilization annihilated in the ruthless Roman counterattack.

Genesis is more than geography—its tales of patriarchs more than history. It reports the struggles of men to climb the foreboding mountains of faith.

1. Alan R. Millard, "Methods of Studying the Patriarchal Narratives as Ancient Texts," *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Leicester, 1980).

2. Judy Siegel-Iskovitch, "Jordanian Dig Confirms Biblical Edom," *Jerusalem Post*, February 21, 2005, featured on the Web site <<http://www.bridgesforpeace.com>>.

Heart Over Heels in Love

LOGOS

Gen. 25:19–29:30; Matt. 5:48; 1 John 4:8–11

The grasping of Esau's heel by Jacob was a sign of Jacob's will to lord it over Esau, though Jacob wasn't the first born. Much of Jacob's story is about the sly and dirty tricks employed by him and his confederates to secure his dominance. If we were putting together a group of readings from the Old Testament and from the Gospels, with what might be called "parallel opposites" as the goal, Jesus taking hold of Peter's heel to wash his feet would be an obvious choice (John 13:4–12).

Some might object to this method of reading the Old Testament, but just such a convention was used by the ancient Hebrews. In Deuteronomy 26 the story of Jacob is first presented as having a "direct linkage" with the Jews at the much later time of Deuteronomy, but then the rest of the passage in that chapter "construes the origin of the Hebrew people as arising through a radical break with previous history."¹ In other words, our salvation is not based on some incorrect claim to legitimacy or dependent on some invalid trickery, but comes from the only begotten Son

of God who, instead of striving for preeminence, comes down from His rightful place at the right hand of the Father and kneels at the feet of sinners to wash the dirtiest parts of them, in humility and love—and then

**It's not that there is no love
in this Jacob narrative.**

goes to die on the cross for us.

A wonderful juxtaposition occurs in the narrative to underscore how evil is Jacob's scheme to fulfill his lust for being first. Immediately after he has tricked Esau into handing over his birthright for "a mess of pottage," the Bible says, "There was a famine in the land" (Gen. 26:1, NKJV). Strikingly, the passage that might spring to our minds from the Gospel as a parallel opposite to this mess-of-pottage small-mindedness (on all sides) comes immediately before the washing of the disciples' feet, when Jesus gives His followers (and us) the wine and the bread. By allowing humans to take His body and blood into themselves and thus have the Son of God incorporated into them, He is allowing each one of us to become sons and daughters of God, in a sense even truer than before. Instead of Jacob's self-seeking for self-aggrandizement, Jesus is lifting us up and giving us the legitimate right to claim a part in the inheritance of the first born. Instead of a mess of pottage, we are offered the Bread of heaven, with all its power.

Now don't get me wrong. It's not that there is no love in this Jacob narrative. Nothing could be further from the truth. Isaac loves Esau. Esau loves Isaac.

Rebekah loves Jacob. Jacob loves Rachel (and Leah). Rachel loves Jacob. In fact, what Robert Alter says about Jacob might well be applied to most of these lovers. Alter calls him a "histrionic Jacob" who is "blinded by excessive love and perhaps" part of his sin is "loving the excess."² Jacob is just as blind as his father. Rebekah loves Jacob enough to pull dirty tricks on her husband (the goat stew instead of venison). Jacob loves Rachel enough to work for her for 14 years. Rachel loves Jacob enough to steal her father's household idol for Jacob's sake. This idol is no simple trinket; it symbolized the family inheritance. So, there's another jockeying scheme to get even more birthright legitimacy (well, illegitimate legitimacy) for Jacob. And all this evil is driven by love! Talk about topsy-turvy morals and motives and emotions! The human heart, even its love, is indeed "deceitful . . . and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9, NKJV).

Now if Jesus—the best human ever—says that only God is good (Luke 18:19), what hope is there for all of us Jacobs (and Rebekahs and Rachels)? And let's not allow anyone to start arguing that since the intention was a loving one the result was OK. All we have to do is to imagine ourselves in Esau's, Isaac's, and Laban's positions (remember all that nimble trickery with the flocks, then the stealing of the idol?) to see the depravity of all this "loving."

The hope for us lies in the fact that all Jacob's later fancy dealing with the flocks (Gen. 30:29–43) is met by Jesus' offering Himself as the spotless Lamb of God. The hope for us lies in the fact that Laban's trickery over marriage is met by Jesus' calling us, through the church, to be His one, true, legitimate bride. And let's get this absolutely straight: We cannot do anything to save ourselves, to secure a heavenly birthright. Remember Jacob's dream of the angels? The angels are on "a stairway (not a ladder) . . . reminiscent of the ziggurats of Mesopotamia with their stairways leading to the place of sacrifice (where the deity dwelt) on top."³

But it is heavenly agents descending and ascending that Jacob discerns. He does not climb the stairs. He does not even *try* to climb them. He just lies there, prostrate, like Jesus' disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His trial. Salvation is a matter of the deity and of heaven and has nothing to do with the power of prostrate sinners, no matter how much human love and endeavor do or do not surround them. The father picks up his heels and runs to embrace the younger, prodigal son, who never had any right to the birthright (Luke 15:20). Never mind the tricks over the flocks and marriage; the father brings out the fatted calf (verse 23), and God calls us "'to the marriage supper of the Lamb'" (Rev. 19:9, NKJV).

1. David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 44.

2. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books [HarperCollins], 1981), p. 22.

3. Jay G. Williams, *Understanding the Old Testament* (New York: Barron's Educational, 1972), p. 91.

God's Will: Always for Good

TESTIMONY

Gen. 28:10–15

When God kept true to His promise and blessed Jacob, did that mean He had consented to the deception that Jacob and his mother perpetrated? Does God's will allow for any, I mean even those trivial and morally questionable, actions in order for His divine purpose to be carried out?

Jacob knew that he had done such ungodly deceitfulness and there is no upright way to redress but to follow God's leading in him. "Jacob felt that God had claims upon him which he must acknowledge, and that the special tokens of divine favor granted him demanded a return. So does every blessing bestowed upon us call for a response to the Author of all our mercies. The Christian should often review his past life and recall with gratitude the precious deliverances that God has wrought for him, supporting him in trial, opening ways before him when all seemed dark and forbidding, refreshing him when ready to faint. He should recognize all of them as evidences of the watchcare of heavenly angels. In view of these innumerable blessings he should often ask, with subdued and grateful heart, 'What

shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?' Psalm 116:12."¹

One wrong deed will not automatically revoke God's promise to Jacob's father. What's really important is that he renewed his commit-

**"The Christian should often
review his past life."**

ment to the Lord as expressed by the first recorded vow in the Bible: "a prayer . . . made in . . . gratitude, humility, and confidence."² Jacob found favor in God's eyes because he has an inward change of heart. It is indeed God's will for Jacob to carry on and lead the people coming from Abraham's lineage. His relationship with God actually paved the way for our Savior to lay His ministry to this deceitful world. Jacob clearly saw this: "in [his] vision the plan of redemption was presented."³ Jacob's experience teaches an object lesson that God is endlessly patient and loving. These virtues are coupled with a forgiving and saving grace even for erring sinners—like Jacob, you, and I.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 187.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 383.

3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 184.

Walking the Path From Trickery to Trust

Wednesday
December 6

HOW-TO

Job 38; Prov. 3:5, 6; 28:26; Isa. 26:3; Luke 16:10

Eve stepped out to take what she felt God was wrongfully withholding. Since that day, the path of trickery has become well worn. Abram and Sarai decided on a surrogate, and Lot's daughters found their own way of providing children. Abraham offered deception as his security against Egypt's ruler. And Jacob established residence on Trickery Lane. How can we change direction from trickery to trust?

1. Know the beginning. "In the beginning God" (Gen. 1:1, NKJV). This is where trust begins. Knowing God comes from time spent in His presence. The better a person knows God, the easier it is to believe that He will do what He has promised and to act on that belief.

2. Be willing to wait. God was there in the beginning. He will be there in the end. He knows all things in the middle. God does things at the right time (Gal. 4:4). Some people weren't ready; others had grown tired of the wait. But God knew that the time was right. He picks the right time in our lives as well. Sometimes we aren't ready. At others we grow tired of waiting, but He orchestrates the events of our days with the same care that He put into wrapping His Son in human skin.

**When we set foot on the
pathway of trust, Satan
trembles.**

3. Seek to want what God wants. It is natural to tell God what we want. It may be a promotion, a raise, health, improved relationships. These things aren't bad, nor are they wrong to desire. But we see only a small piece of the path. God sees where things will lead. He loves us enough to endure the death of His own Son for our sakes. He also loves us enough to provide us with things that will bless us even though they may be uncomfortable at times and to withhold or remove things that will harm us. In giving our will to God, we shed distraction so that we may focus our personality and gifts to shine in the place where God has chosen to place us.

4. Don't quit. When we know God, when we wait on His timing, when we seek His will instead of our own, we become linked with God and His strength. Satan cannot defeat this strength, and he knows it. We must firmly keep our hand in God's even when it looks as if things aren't happening the way we thought they should.

Impulse Buying

OPINION

Gen. 25:29–34

Throughout the ages people have always done a double take at the sight of twins, pun intended. Nowadays the sight automatically brings up the question, “Was it natural or fertility-drug assisted?” A twin is one of two children developed within the uterus at the same time from the same impregnation.

Jacob and Esau’s saga began in the womb with such a dramatic birth that it had to be recorded in history. “The first was very red at birth. . . . So they called him Esau. Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau’s heel. So they called him Jacob” (Gen. 25:25, 26, NLT).

Twins often exhibit a continuous drive to stand apart from their mirror image. Competition is often playful; however, it is not uncommon for one twin to display superiority—especially from the birth order. Ask a twin who is the older brother or sister, and they can tell you down to the seconds or minutes. Birth order is important. According to *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, your birthright is “any right that a person has at birth.” Esau—after a long day in the field—claimed that he was on

the brink of certain death, so he reasoned that his natural birthright could not provide nourishment. He traded the lasting benefits of his birthright for the immediate pleasure

Birth order is important.

of food. Undoubtedly, Jacob’s signature dish of red-lentil stew was something “to die for!”

How often do we fall into that same trap of impulse buying? When we see something we want, we can too easily find a way to justify spending money. Credit cards allow us to lose sight of the future and exaggerate our wants into urgent needs. “I have nothing to wear” for another shade of blue blouse. Perhaps it is “I need a car” for a sportier, more expensive mode of transportation. Or better yet: “It’s perfect!” for the 32nd pair of shoes. It all shows how hard it is to avoid making Esau’s mistake of not comparing short-term satisfaction with its long-range consequences before we act.

Jesus’ death on Mt. Calvary was a great moment in earth’s history. The greater moment took place when He rose from the grave. “God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And he gave them right standing with himself, and he promised them his glory” (Rom. 8:29, 30, NLT).

Protect your birthright.

Seeking the Blessing

EXPLORATION

Gen. 27:18–29

CONCLUDE

From the story of Isaac, his two sons, and the contested birthright, we can learn that God can fulfill His promises, even when we fail to meet His expectations. With a change of heart, we can come again into true communion with our Creator. But we must wait for God to work His will in us. And we should never trick others or take God's blessings away from them. Accept your birthright today!

CONSIDER

- Scripting and performing a short play about siblings who disagree over what their parents have given them. How can they resolve the dispute in a way that illustrates the lessons of Jacob and Esau's stories?
- Composing and performing a contemporary Christian song based on the hymn that starts "There shall be showers of blessings."
- Listing and ranking the top 10 or 25 blessings God has bestowed on you so far in your life.
- Reading several accounts in the Bible of Jesus, kings, prophets, etc., blessing others. How do these blessing scenes differ from the story of Isaac, Jacob, and Esau?
- Painting a representation of your own "mess of pottage"—the thing you feel most tempted to trade for God's birthright to you.
- Researching the terms *birthright*, *blessing*, *legacy*, *inheritance*, etc. Note especially their histories and usages.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chaps. 16–19; *Conflict and Courage*, chap. 54.

Commentaries on Genesis 27 at <<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getChapterSections&cid=18&source=2&schap=27>>.

Emil G. Hirsch, et al., "Jacob" at <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=19&letter=J>>.

Jacob becomes Israel



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

Struggler With God

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 32:22–32

When I entered my father's hospital ward, there was already a visitor at his bedside. My father had retired three months earlier, looking forward to taking things a little easier and pursuing his many interests. However, just over a month later, he woke from a bad dream to realize he was in the midst of suffering a stroke.

Six weeks later my dad was still in the hospital and unable to move without someone else's help—the left side of his body was paralyzed. We were starting to realize that any recovery he achieved from this point on would be slow and slight. We were uncertain how we would manage his ongoing care, but we were coming to understand that he would need a lot of it. And the bills were piling up.

My dad's visitor that day was a lady from the local church. As I came in, she was giving an update on the happenings of her own family. Her daughter's husband had recently ended his own troubled life, leaving a wife with two small children and a mess of emotions.

It was obvious that both my father and his visitor that day were experiencing a tumult of doubts, fears, and pain. But on that day their conversation moved in a different direction. They spoke of the goodness of God and His trustworthiness. They spoke of how they believed God was present in their situations to make things not as bad as they might otherwise have been. They spoke of how their faith in God gave them hope to keep on going.

They both, my father and his visitor in that hospital ward, were struggling with God in the circumstances of their lives. Struggling to find the blessing of God in their situations. Struggling to find the hope in their helplessness. Struggling to find the meaning in their tragedy, mess, and pain.

As strugglers with God, they join the line traced all the way back to Jacob, whose name is even changed to struggler with God ("Israel" in Hebrew) after spending the night wrestling with a Stranger. Jacob may have literally wrestled with God, but the story we have of his life shows a larger struggle playing out.

It's not a coincidence that the "great nation" originally promised to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, bore this same name—a nation of strugglers with God. History confirms the truth of this. If we as Christians consider ourselves "spiritual Israel," we must first accept the literal meaning of this. We must expect that we will join the long line of that original struggler with God.

**We were uncertain how we
would manage his ongoing
care.**

More Than Just a Name Change

LOGOS

Genesis 29–33

Corporations spend huge amounts of money in “rebranding” their corporate image. New logos are designed, offices are redecorated, innovative stationery is printed, trendy uniforms are tailored, and fresh colors are selected. Christians also undergo a similar process of “rebranding”—Jacob is perhaps one of the best examples. From a “heel grasper” he became a “struggler with God”—from a deceiver he was rebranded into the father of Israel.

Deceiving Others and Being Deceived (Genesis 29, 30)

The Bible portrays Jacob as someone who had a natural predisposition to tricking and deceiving others. He tricked his own twin brother out of his inheritance (Genesis 27). In Genesis 29 Jacob is on the receiving end. The agreement with Laban was broken: Instead of marrying Rachel, who was younger and “beautiful of form and appearance” (29:17, NKJV), he ends up marrying Leah, the older daughter who had “weak eyes” (verse 17, NIV).

**God’s grace responds
dramatically.**

Although united in marriage with Rachel a week after the wedding with Leah, Jacob still had to work an additional seven years for Laban in order to pay for the love of his life (verses 27, 28, 30). Leah and Rachel compete for Jacob’s affection, and as a result children are born. The biblical account paints a picture of constant tension and manipulation. Servants are used to outscore the opponent.

Amazingly, in all this human struggle, God is in the process of fulfilling His will. In every child that is born, God sees the future leader of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. This is grace.

God is full of grace—and that grace is sometimes manifest in God allowing us to taste what we have served to others. In His grace toward us God will allow whatever is necessary to teach us and to draw us closer to Him. In Jacob’s case the treatment he received from Laban was instrumental in getting him back to God—even if that meant being cheated “ten times” (31:7, NKJV).

Running Away and Running Toward (Genesis 31)

The increased blessings and protection received from God created jealousy and negative feelings on the part of Laban and his sons. Jacob and his wives

decided to run away—but Jacob continues to deceive (verse 20), and his wife steals family treasures: the idols. They are running away from Laban and they are running toward the “father’s house” (verse 30, NKJV). They are running in fear.

Jacob in his ignorance risks Rachel’s life (verses 32, 33). Rachel, on the other hand, continues to deceive (verse 35). While Jacob and his family are going in the right direction, they are a long way from where God wants them to be.

Jacob realizes that it is not his wisdom, or Rachel’s deceptions, that have kept them safe till now—it was God’s grace (verse 42).

Wrestling (Genesis 32)

God’s grace responds dramatically. God is graciously allowing Jacob to wrestle with Him. Here Jacob learns a vital lesson: Even God could “not overpower” (verse 25, NIV) a resisting human heart. Only when individuals cease to scheme, strategize, and prosper by deception can God step in. Only when we as human beings grasp God and refuse to let go, when we completely reject all other options, can God “rebrand” us into what He wants us to be. But when God does the rebranding, the change is not just a logo-and-stationery change. It is not a cosmetic change. It is a radical change of heart and character.

Wrestling with God until all else is exhausted and given up will result in seeing God! This place was the new beginning for Jacob. A new name symbolized a new person who has learned to trust in God fully. “Israel” means “he struggles with God” rather than continuing to struggle in his power and wisdom. On his way to the Promised Land, Jacob was rebranded into a person fit to be back in the place of his father.

Reconciling (Genesis 33)

God’s grace works in the strangest of circumstances and waits for the opportune moment to become the transforming power in an individual’s heart.

Upon settling in the new place, Jacob builds an altar acknowledging God. He names this special place “El Elohe Israel,” which can be translated “mighty is the God of Israel.” God is indeed mighty to save and reconcile us to Him. His grace has no limits. If He can change Jacob into Israel, He can change any individual willing to wrestle with God and surrender to His power.

REACT

1. In what ways, if any, are you a “deceiver” and what specific steps do you think you should make for this to change?

2. Are you also running in fear? Fear of what? What is the best way to deal with those fears?

3. In what way do you think God wants to “wrestle” with you? What will be the outcome?

"I Won't Let You Go!"

TESTIMONY

Gen. 32:22-32

"Having sent his family away, that they may not witness his distress, Jacob remains alone to intercede with God. He confesses his sin and gratefully acknowledges the mercy of God toward him, while with deep humiliation he pleads the covenant made with his fathers and the promises to himself in the night vision at Bethel and in the land of his exile. The crisis in his life has come; everything is at stake. In the darkness and solitude he continues praying and humbling himself before God. Suddenly a hand is laid upon his shoulder. He thinks that an enemy is seeking his life, and with all the energy of despair he wrestles with his assailant. As the day begins to break, the stranger puts forth his superhuman power; at his touch the strong man seems paralyzed, and he falls, a helpless, weeping suppliant, upon the neck of his mysterious antagonist. Jacob knows now that it is the Angel of the covenant with whom he has been in conflict. Though disabled and suffering the keenest pain, he does not relinquish his purpose. Long has he endured perplexity, remorse, and trouble for his sin; now he must have the assurance that

**"Jacob clings to him,
pleading for a blessing."**

it is pardoned. The divine visitant seems about to depart; but Jacob clings to Him, pleading for a blessing. The Angel urges, 'Let Me go; for the day breaketh;' but the patriarch exclaims, 'I will not let Thee go,

except Thou bless me.' What confidence, what firmness and perseverance, are here displayed! Had this been a boastful, presumptuous claim, Jacob would have been instantly destroyed; but his was the assurance of one who confesses his weakness and unworthiness, yet trusts the mercy of a covenant-keeping God.

" 'He had power over the Angel, and prevailed.' Hosea 12:4. Through humiliation, repentance, and self-surrender, this sinful, erring mortal prevailed with the Majesty of heaven. He had fastened his trembling grasp upon the promises of God, and the heart of Infinite Love could not turn away the sinner's plea. As an evidence of his triumph and an encouragement to others to imitate his example, his name was changed from one which was a reminder of his sin, to one that commemorated his victory. And the fact that Jacob had prevailed with God was an assurance that he would prevail with men. He no longer feared to encounter his brother's anger, for the Lord was his defense."*

**The Great Controversy*, pp. 616, 617.

Selective Breeding or Selective Reading

EVIDENCE

Gen. 30:25–31:13

Mendelian laws of inheritance state that physical traits of offspring are determined by an equal number of genes contributed by both parents. A genetic trait will be expressed depending on whether it is dominant (white sheep or black goats, which we will designate as “u” for uniform) or recessive (partially dark sheep, light speckled goats, which we will designate as “s” for speckled). Jacob offers to take all the sheep and goats exhibiting recessive genes (s-s) as payment. Although Laban’s removal of the speckled animals, statistically about 25 percent, reduced the prevalence of the recessive gene in the main flock, it was still present, though not exhibited, in the mixed gene or heterozygote animals (u-s).

Of the remaining 75 percent of the flock, about two-thirds would have been heterozygotes (u-s) and one-third monozygotes (u-u). By breeding the heterozygotes (u-s with u-s) and not the monozygotes (u-u with u-u or u-s) Jacob was able to increase the offspring of speckled appearance over successive generations. It has been calculated that after seven mating seasons Jacob would have possessed 39 percent of the flock versus 15 percent had this breeding program not been followed.¹

The appearance in the text of Jacob’s “magic” sticks creates a problem for modern readers. A number of explanations have been offered.² However one explains the sticks, they are clearly a tool in the hand of Jacob to outmaneuver Laban—all with God’s blessing! Just as Jacob used red lentil stew to deceive his “red” brother Esau, so now he uses white “poplar” sticks and “white” sheep, which in Hebrew are a word play on the name “Laban,” to deceive his uncle.

Ultimately, what drives the plot is not science or superstition but the human spirit and divine faithfulness enabling Jacob to return to the homeland God had promised and establish a great nation.

**Ultimately, what drives the
plot is not science or
superstition.**

1. Yehudah Felix, *Genes and Heredity in Laban’s Sheep* (published online by Jerusalem College of Technology. Retrieved 06/15/05 from <[http://www.jct.ac.il/judaica/dvarTorah/Vayetze\(E\).html](http://www.jct.ac.il/judaica/dvarTorah/Vayetze(E).html)>

2. Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1994), pp. 470–477.

Jacob's Wrestling Tips

HOW-TO

Gen. 32:22–31; 1 Kings 19:9–13

No screaming fans. No absurd costumes. No posing, flexing, or ranting. No staged body-slams or pile-drivers. No timekeeper, no point scoring, no rests, no referee. Just two wrestlers grappling for advantage by moonlight, their grunts of exertion echoing off the darkened hills.

Jacob wrestled God. Wow! What a concept! This must be the most physical interaction between God and humanity recorded in the entire Old Testament. Why did God choose to deal with Jacob this way?

But despite the mystery, there are a few things we can learn from this story. Let's call them "Jacob's wrestling tips":

1. To meet God, Jacob had to be alone. He sent his family on ahead in order to experience solitude. Yes, God can communicate with us any time, but His specialty is the still, small Voice (1 Kings 19:9–13), which is best heard in a quiet place, free of distractions.

2. Jacob was prepared to put in some serious time. Jacob was aware that his situation was a spaghetti-like mess, with more devious intertwined subplots than a daytime soap opera. He would wrestle with God for as long as it took, no matter if God's communication style was a little

**"Hey, what's with the
dislocation thing?"**

unorthodox on this occasion. This degree of spiritual urgency seems pretty rare these days. But unless we recapture it, the motivation to prioritize time for God will always be lacking.

3. Jacob never gave up. He didn't stop to ask, "Hey, what's with the dislocation thing?" Once he knew he'd found God, he refused to let go without a blessing. The implications for us are self-explanatory really. But why let go at all?

REACT

1. When we "wrestle" with God, where do we draw the line between honest questioning and disrespect?

2. What possible reason might God have had for dislocating Jacob's hip? Does God ever cause suffering?

3. What prevents us from having meaningful encounters with God?

What's in a Name?

OPINION

Rev. 3:7–13; 22:4

When Jacob wrestled with God, the real outcome was a new name. No longer Jacob (“he grasps the heel” or “he deceives”) but Israel (“he struggles with God”).

Isaiah tells the story of a prophecy that was given to Ahaz, King of Judah, approximately 735 B.C. The far northern Assyrian Empire was beginning to expand its borders. King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel (ten northern tribes) were the first to feel the pressure and had formed an alliance in order to repel the encroaching Assyrian army. They wanted Ahaz, King of Judah, to join with them and were prepared to persuade Ahaz by force if necessary. Ahaz trembled with fear for his throne “just as trees shake in a storm” (Isa. 7:2, NLT). Isaiah came to him and said not to worry—the Lord will protect you and here is a sign: A young woman will conceive a child and her son will be called “Immanuel,” which means God with us (verse 14). But Ahaz had already made a deal with Assyria (2 Kings 16:7), and thus rejected the Lord’s promise. So instead, when the child was born the child was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa. 8:3), meaning speed the spoil, hasten the booty.

In the book of Revelation, John records that to those who obeyed the words of Jesus, did not deny Him, and persevered in their faith, God will give a new name (Rev. 3:7–13; 22:4).

If we change the name our parents gave us to something else, what actually changes? Would we be more kind, loving, and patient? Would we be able to run faster, be physically stronger? Would we be wealthier? Would people stop and stare in jealous admiration?

Have you ever met someone who was really particular about how their name was spelled or pronounced? I wonder if God places a different emphasis on our name. If so, what is it? And if we placed the same emphasis as God, what would we be more concerned about?

God will give a new name.

REACT

1. Why does the Bible put so much emphasis on a person’s name?
2. If you had the choice, what name would you give yourself and why?
3. What does God giving us a new name tell us about His grace?

The Ultimate Makeover

EXPLORATION

Isa. 62:2; Jer. 29:11; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 John 3:1–3; Rev. 3:12

CONCLUDE

Jacob's story is more than a tale of a trickster who finally acknowledges God's grace and blessing in his life. It's my story. It's your story. God is in control of your life, even when everything seems chaotic. God even wants to give you a new name, signifying a whole new direction in your life, a brand-new identity.

CONSIDER

- Researching the spiritual significance of your name. Consult a good name book or an online resource, such as <http://christianity.about.com/od/christianbabynames/>. Choose a scriptural story or text that underscores the biblical meaning of your name.
- Choosing a new name for yourself from a spiritual point of view. How could you imagine that name changing your identity and future?
- Drawing a coat-of-arms or creating a collage for your new spiritual name and identity.
- Taking a spiritual-observation hike in nature to look for evidences of God's re-creative, restorative power. What natural objects symbolize God's working in your life at this time?
- Listening to and meditating on the song "Generations" by Sara Groves. What message is the Holy Spirit speaking to you through the words and images of these contemporary lyrics?

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 195–203; online version of this chapter: <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/pp/pp18.html>.

Watchman Nee, *Changed Into His Likeness*; James Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*.

From Prison cell to Palace



“ ‘There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’ ” (Gen. 39:9, NKJV).

Dare to Be Different

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 3:3

Joseph's story is not an isolated case. Today people meet daily with the choice of giving in to the crowd or being separate from the world. Joseph's life is a template that defines Christian living amid worldly surroundings and is one we would be wise to follow.

You may be thinking, *Now come on, I want to have fun and lots of friends; being different is not exciting or popular.* Being one of the only Adventists at the community college I attend, I know how it feels to be the only one not going along with the crowd. Numerous temptations cross my path, just as they cross yours, and it all comes down to the choice of whether to yield or to dare to be different, whether to depend on God's grace or to do my own thing.

A story is told of a young man commissioned by the king of England to be a representative of the royal court. The king gave the young man a special signet to pin to his overcoat to set him apart as an official on the king's business. He was to wear it at all times. One evening the young man entered a village inn. He was tired from a long day of travel and wearily asked for a room. But before retiring for the

**"Anyone who believes in
the king, I challenge such a
man to stand!"**

night, he entered the inn's dining hall and ordered supper. The room was full and the conversations animated. As the young man waited for his meal, he could not help listening in on the talk about him. Soon he realized that the people were speaking indignantly of the king. Feeling rather uncomfortable, the young man discretely removed his signet. Then a man stood and bellowed out, "Anyone who believes in the king, I challenge such a man to stand!" Not a man stood. The young man reasoned that he would honor the king in his heart, but he couldn't be expected to be the only man to challenge the rest of the crowd.

Is this how you respond when our heavenly King is maligned by your friends, co-workers, or professors? Do you remain silent and try to act neutral? Joseph chose to honor God even when honoring God meant certain punishment. If Joseph hadn't purposed in his heart to follow God and trusted in God's power to keep him faithful, he would have been taken down by Satan's devices. "By firm principle, and unwavering trust in God, [our] virtue and nobleness of character can shine, and, although surrounded with evil, no taint need be left upon [our] virtue and integrity."*

Dare to be different!

* *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 33.

History of Joseph: God's Ultimate Purpose

Sunday
December 17

EVIDENCE

Gen. 39:9

Think of the developments in Joseph's life over which he had no control at all. His father favored him over his brothers, and they resented Joseph for this. His natural gifts caused others to envy him. Foreign traders came along soon after his treacherous brothers had thrown him into a pit, and they carried him off to Egypt. He was tempted by his boss's wife. He was imprisoned. Yet whatever happened, Joseph remained faithful to God.

The rich complexity that was Joseph's life discloses a theme: integrity. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph was appalled (Gen. 39:9).

Potiphar's wife redoubled her seductive efforts, but Joseph didn't yield. Integrity is easy when there's no temptation. Obedience is easy when there's no seductive whisper. Obedience becomes difficult, however, and means worlds more, when temptation is relentless. After Joseph had cried "No!" to Potiphar's wife, she slandered him. Now obedience was costly. Obedience and integrity under these circumstances are maintained only by grace and by grit.

Another theme emerges from Joseph's life: that of blessing. One of the most startling features of Joseph's story is the fact that people

whose lives intersect with Joseph's life find themselves blessed, assisted, enhanced. To be around Joseph was to be graced and to find oneself enriched.

In Genesis 49 we find Jacob blessing and prophesying about each of his sons' descendants "in the last days" (verse 1, KJV). Notice that the blessings Jacob pronounces on the descendants of Joseph are monumental. " 'Because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb. Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers' " (verses 25, 26, NIV). May these blessings rest on our heads, as well, as we seek to serve Joseph's God with integrity like his.

**Integrity is easy when
there's no temptation.**

REACT

1. What hindrances in our lives compromise our integrity?
2. How can we and our descendants receive a blessing such as Joseph did?

Joseph's Destiny: Personal Choice or God's Decision?

LOGOS

Gen. 37:2–41:40, Ephesians 1

Favorite Son (Gen. 37:2–17)

Joseph's story begins with good fortune (or is it God?) smiling on the favorite son of a rich patriarch. Joseph is the long-awaited child of his father's favorite wife, Rachel, who dies sometime later after giving birth to a second son. This makes Joseph all the more precious to his father.

Handsome in face and physique and a good boy as well, Joseph receives special treatment—and a rainbow coat—from his father. He is close to being spoiled! He tells tales on his brothers, which enrages them, of course, and tells his family about dreams that make it look as if Joseph is destined to rule above his father. Even his father has a problem with that, but the favorite son seems to carry the day.

Sold Out (Gen. 37:18–36)

In the first of the strange twists that Joseph's story takes, Joseph's brothers find a chance to sell him off to slave traders. It's a terrible shock to Joseph and even a surprise to the rest of us; we know they were jealous, but who would think that Jacob's sons were really that bad?

They had planned to kill him, but Judah comes up with the bright idea of making a profit instead. No longer master of his own fate (or was he ever?), Joseph is dragged off to Egypt.

Favorite Slave (Gen. 39:1–20)

Despite his bad luck, Joseph the slave does everything right in Egypt. Smart as well as handsome, he quickly proves his management abilities and is awarded a wonderful position as overseer of all of Potiphar's possessions. Potiphar prospers and everything goes well until Potiphar's wife becomes infatuated with Joseph, and Joseph's fortunes fall again. Or was this fate? Was it because of Joseph's choices that he was sent to the dungeon, or was it God who made everything turn out this way?

**Do our choices determine
our destiny?**

Forgotten in Prison (Gen. 39:21–40:23)

Joseph spends a long time in prison. He still does everything right. He rises to a position of honor because of his integrity, but a man can only rise so far in a prison. He gets a crack at justice when he explains a few of his fellow prisoners' dreams, but once restored to his position, the king's cupbearer forgets all about Joseph.

It makes a person wonder. Was this just another example of Joseph suffering as the victim of bad choices other people made: his brothers, Potiphar's wife—and now the forgetful cupbearer? Or did God cause the cupbearer to forget?

As the saying goes, if it weren't for bad luck, Joseph wouldn't have any luck at all.

Favorite Prime Minister (Gen. 41:1–40)

Then Joseph's luck turns again. Or maybe God is working at last. Pharaoh has a dream, the king's cupbearer finally remembers Joseph, and in a stunning series of events, Joseph moves from slave and prisoner to prime minister of the most powerful nation on earth. That makes him ruler even over his father, just as the dream foretold.

In light of Joseph's story, what do you think about your own life? Do you have a destiny as Joseph did? Does everyone get one, or do just favorite people get destinies from God? If Joseph is an example of how God treats His favorite people, do you want to sign up to be one of them? After examining all the ins and outs of this story, what do you make of the role that personal choices have in fulfilling destiny? Do our choices determine our destiny? Can our personal choices derail God's destiny for us?

Despite all of Joseph's good choices, it seemed to take a long time for God to act in his favor. Perhaps it wasn't Joseph's destiny that God had uppermost in His mind. Perhaps while Joseph felt he was wasting away in the dungeon, God was working out a plan to use Joseph to save Egypt and many of the surrounding nations as well! We tend to think that the most important things in the world are our life, our happiness, and our success. Perhaps all those things are subordinate to God's plan for the well-being of the world.

REACT

Read the first chapter of Ephesians. Then respond to these questions:

1. Are there things in your life that seem unfair or unlucky or that seem to demonstrate that God isn't working on your behalf?
2. In many cultures, fate, luck, or destiny—not personal choice—determine how your life turns out. What do you believe about luck? What do you believe about the importance of personal choices and God's activities on your behalf?
3. What is God's destiny for you?

Practical Pointers to Preserve the Purity Principle

TESTIMONY

Gen. 39:1-9

In the life of Joseph are revealed the keys to success in preserving morality and spirituality in a worldly environment.

After being taken captive he “gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile.”¹

“The Lord prospered Joseph, but in the midst of his prosperity comes the darkest adversity. The wife of his master is a licentious woman, one who urged his steps to take hold on hell.”²

“Heretofore he had remained untainted by the corruption teeming in that heathen land; but this temptation, so sudden, so strong, so seductive—how should it be met? Joseph knew well what would be the consequence of resistance. On the one hand were concealment, favor, and rewards; on the other, disgrace, imprisonment, perhaps death. His whole future life depended upon the decision of the moment. Would principle triumph? Would Joseph still be true to God?”³

“Whatever the consequences, he would be true to his Master in heaven.”

“Joseph calmly casts his eyes to heaven for help, slips off his loose outer garment, leaving it in the hand of his tempter, and while his eye is lighted with determined resolve in the place of unholy passion, he exclaims, ‘How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?’

The victory is gained; he flees from the enchanter; he is saved.”⁴

“Joseph’s answer reveals the power of religious principle. He would not betray the confidence of his master on earth, and, whatever the consequences, he would be true to his Master in heaven. . . .

“If we were to cherish an habitual impression that God sees and hears all that we do and say and keeps a faithful record of our words and actions, and that we must meet it all, we would fear to sin. Let the young ever remember that wherever they are, and whatever they do, they are in the presence of God.”⁵

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 213.

2. *Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 69.

3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 217.

4. *Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 69.

5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 217.

How to Be Honorable

HOW-TO

2 Cor. 13:7; Heb. 13:18

Those around Joseph respected his abilities and his character. They saw him as a wise yet humble person, honorable in everything he did, and successful. In an unfair world, a sinful world, Joseph stands out as a beacon, then and now.

So how can we be like Joseph? How can we exemplify a Christlike character in everything we do? Here are a few guidelines.

- **Be honest.** We all know the old adage “Honesty is the best policy.” But we often blur the line between honesty and dishonesty in our minds. Some will even justify a lie, thinking that it is better not to tell the truth. Second Corinthians 4:2 describes the principles of honesty and integrity we should follow.

- **Be dependable.** Jesus tells a parable about a man who had two sons and a vineyard. One son refused his father's request for help in the vineyard but later showed up and helped anyway. The other son said he was willing to work but instead went and did his own thing. Jesus asks, “Which of the two did the will of his father?” (Matt. 21:31, NKJV). Dependability is important.

- **Be thorough.** When 16-year-old Booker T. Washington traveled to Hampton Institute in 1872, he had only 52 cents and was told he could not attend the school. Later that afternoon, as he sat dejected in the hallway, the school headmistress told him in passing that a nearby room needed sweeping. Seeing his chance, Booker swept the room three times, dusted and cleaned all the furniture and walls in the room, and even cleaned the closet. After inspecting every inch of the room, the headmistress told him that he and his 52 cents were accepted at Hampton Institute. Because of the principles that guided his life, Booker T. Washington went on to establish Tuskegee Institute and become a noted educator.*

- **Trust in God and follow His direction.** When we try to go our own way against God's plan, we find ourselves buried in pain and discontent. We don't always know what is best for us, but God does. Life is so much better when we let Him lead.

Life is so much better when
we let Him lead.

*Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 1901.

Of Rats and Rags: Joseph's Prayer

OPINION

Gen. 39:21–40:23

Why? I don't understand. For the second time I find myself helplessly imprisoned. Years have passed since the first time I was in shackles, and the anger I felt then has lessened, but now, here I am again, this time in a dungeon.

I was doing so well, Lord! It wasn't great being a slave, but You gave me that nice job as the head of Potiphar's household. Everything was going along fine, and everyone was happy, until this whole fiasco with Potiphar's wife.

Lord, the smell is so bad. It's bad enough sharing my bed with rats, but do I have to smell like one? I used to be clean. I used to be important. You promised such great things; look at me now.

It's dark here, Lord. The sunlight comes through only in patches. I miss its warmth. I miss the colors of the marketplace with light flooding the streets, the river at sunset, and the sweet taste of figs and honey. I miss my father and Benjamin so much, and I don't think I'll ever see them again.

You promised such great things and look at me now.

Oh, heavenly Father, forgive me for my impatience. I do know I'm in Your hands wherever I am—in the lowest prison cell or high in the favor of the nobles. You placed me in Potiphar's household and You have

placed me here. Grant me peace. I want to serve You, my King. If this prison is where You want me to be, I will serve You.

There must be important things for me to do for You here; open my eyes that I may see what they are. This darkness helps me realize what life is like for those who don't have the light of Your love. Make me blaze for You.

I am Your humble servant, Lord, a steward of Your name. Help me serve You with integrity and honor and represent You in everything I do, wherever I am. I praise You; You have blessed me and I praise Your name. Thank You for caring for me. I love You, my God.

REACT

1. Has it been hard for you to understand why things are working out the way they are in your life? How do you relate to God when you don't understand what's going on?

2. How can you serve God today? Be specific.

To Heights Dreamed Of

EXPLORATION

Genesis 39–41

CONCLUDE

Joseph found himself in bad situations that did not result from any choices he made. Yet even in those difficult times, even through his despair, he did not compromise his principles. Rather, he upheld his integrity. On the bigger scale of things, God had made plans for him much earlier; and Joseph's choosing to live right allowed him to live out those plans. And so, God's blessings did not fall upon Joseph alone, but extended to those who came in contact with him.

CONSIDER

- Creating a timeline of Joseph's life. Color code the different periods of his life to differentiate the hard times from the better ones.
- Watching the animated film *Joseph: King of Dreams* with a young friend or relative. Discuss with him/her how the different situations brought Joseph to a position where he was able to help many.
- Reading Psalm 18, a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance, and memorizing your favorite verses from the chapter.
- Comparing the life of Joseph with that of Bruce in the film *Bruce Almighty*. Does having complete control of your life provide for a better life?
- Rewriting the story of Joseph in today's context.
- Thinking back to the most difficult time in your life. Reflect on the positive aspects of the situation—what you learned about yourself, how it made you stronger, how you learned to cope with challenges, etc.
- Listening to the song "Through It All" written by Andrae Crouch sung by Selah on their album *Hiding Place*. Focus on the lyrics of the song.

CONNECT

Spiritual Gifts, vol. 3, pp. 138–180.

The End of the Beginning



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

Better Is the End

INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 7:8

As wise Solomon once said, "The end of a thing is better than its beginning" (Eccles. 7:8, NKJV). Is this the case when we look back at Genesis? Didn't the beginning seem so much better? Humankind was in perfect communion with God. But with one act of disobedience, generation upon generation was cursed to be born into sin. Nevertheless, God left a promise that a Redeemer would come and rescue His people. God made a promise in the beginning that we may have an expected end.

When we go through troubles and trials, we can't see the end. We see only the beginning. How does it feel when God has made an end to our troubles? Jesus prayed that His cup be taken away if it were possible. What relief He must have felt while saying, "It is finished!" Like Him, we are glad when we reach the end. But what if Jesus would've decided not to go through Calvary? Humanity would've been lost. Good things come in the midst of storms. We can't always see the sunshine and rainbow that come out of them, but we have to make the choice to have faith that God will see us through it all, and we must have a hope that lights up in us and sees the end through the eyes of faith. God will guide us through the night, for we walk by faith and not by sight.

**We have a choice, just as
Joseph had a choice.**

Though we were born into sin, we have a choice, just as Joseph had a choice. Joseph chose not to give in to Potiphar's wife. Instead he chose to have faith, and through Joseph's choice God sought to make him second in command in Egypt. As you read this week's lesson, think about all the choices Joseph had to make. Feel Joseph's emotions as he reunites with his brothers and father. Imagine the overwhelming feelings when he sees his brothers for the first time since he was sold into slavery. Feel the guilt of his brothers as they stood before Joseph and were accused of being spies. Be there when Jacob reunites with his beloved son. Be there when Joseph forgives his brothers at the end and tells them they will be in the Promised Land.

Responding to the Unexpected

LOGOS

Gen. 41:41–50:26

“‘Why do you just keep looking at each other?’” (Gen. 42:1, NIV).

Have you been there? The greatest laid plans of men fall crashing to the ground, and you are left holding the pieces of life—just looking around at each other saying, “What happened?” That was the captivating theme that kept coming back as I considered our section of Scripture for this week. The story, as many of us heard it from our childhood, is very familiar in most of its details. Yet the application can be as profound as the story is predictable.

First the story: Joseph is the favorite; his brothers sell him into slavery; Joseph remains true to his convictions, and it lands him in prison; he stays true to those same convictions in the cell and is rewarded by being forgotten for two years. Then Pharaoh dreams, Joseph interprets, and he is promoted from inmate to soul-mate of the Pharaoh. *The dreams come true:* The famine is severe, Joseph’s family is

saved, and they all live happily ever after. So why do you just keep looking at each other?

**The famine was great, but
the immeasurable supply
was greater.**

Now “the rest of the story”: Our portion of the scenario for this week actually picks up after the interpretation of the dreams and the pro-

nouncement by Pharaoh that Joseph is now second-in-command of all of Egypt. That’s quite a promotion for simply confirming the counsel of some cows and corn! What do you think the probability would be of an inmate at your local penitentiary being declared lieutenant governor simply because he came up with a meaning of the governor’s dreams? What do you think gave Joseph the faithful fortitude to be called from the depths of the dungeon to the courts of the Pharaoh and when given an assignment (interpreting the dreams) to say, “I can’t do it,—but God can” (41:16, paraphrased)? That’s probably not how he had his day planned in prison. I wonder how prepared I am to respond to the inconceivable solutions God brings into my life to rescue me from challenges?

Joseph was 30 years old and second-in-command. He levied a 20 percent tax on all the people, except the church (47:26), to cover a 14.3 percent future deficit. Was he a shrewd businessman, a selfish hoarder, a benevolent dictator anticipating the needs of surrounding countries, or a servant of God, in tune with his Creator enough to sense with his intellect the will of God to provide for his family? It was a good plan that worked, though probably appreciated about as much as

similar taxes that we have to pay today. I'm thinking that the business mind of Joseph in devising this plan was inspired by the same God to whom he gave the credit originally when confronted with the problem. I wonder how prepared I am to respond to the inexplicable solutions God gives me as I search for His methods of preparing me for the future.

The famine was great, but the immeasurable supply was greater. Joseph's dad and brothers were sitting around in a circle just looking at each other (see the opening text)! The solution to the problem confronting God's chosen people was found in a heathen land! That doesn't sound very theologically safe! But Jacob was a wise man, and he sent his kids to get food, even if it was from the heathens. I wonder how prepared I am to gain useful items from those "not of my faith."

And Joseph has a chance to get even. The memory of the well, the torn coat-of-many-colors, the slavery, the separation, probably did not vanish from his memory over time. Now his brothers were there at his feet, bowing just as his dream said they would! Now he would, or at least could, show them his power and get even! Perhaps as a little brotherly joke or perhaps from a sincere heart of discerning their changed hearts, Joseph played a few mind games with them by returning their money, lining them up by age at the banquet table, setting them up to have to answer to their father about the potential fate of Benjamin, and ultimately blew their minds with the pronouncement "I am your brother Joseph" (45:3). I wonder how conscious of my motives I am when confronted with carefully concocting the approach to give help to those who have hurt me?

So the family joins Joseph in Egypt and they live happily ever after—or at least as long as father and son knew. They all settled in the land and shared in the bounty that Joseph had so carefully stockpiled. Jacob had a chance to meet Pharaoh and bless him (47:10). I like that. In the margin of my Bible I have written "age was more imperial than authority, the old shepherd greater than the mighty Pharaoh." I don't know where I read it, but it reminds me every time I see it that

- a child of God is greater than the greatest ruler of this earth;
- a servant of God is wiser than the wisest of the wise men;
- a faithful follower, with a foundation well grounded in his God, can have an amazing freedom to explore solutions even outside his traditional circle;
- a conscientious life is rewarded with wisdom beyond expectation;
- a forgiving person is greater than anyone who seeks even deserved revenge.

Is it fair to compare the life of a Bible character with our lives today? I didn't touch the blessings of father Jacob/Israel on his children (Genesis 49).

Read Genesis 50:24. If you were Joseph's brothers, would you believe this promise? Do you think they continued believing the story as recorded in Exodus? How easy is it to believe God's messengers?

Out of Control

TESTIMONY

Ps. 91:11, 12

The interstate glistened with a light rain and ice as my husband and I drove back to New York City from a holiday trip in Alabama. As we traveled along the dark highway, we were an hour away from home when the wind and the rain began to increase. Suddenly, we hit a patch of black ice and the vehicle spun wildly out of control. I looked over at my husband and my heart beat frantically as I watched him unsuccessfully try to regain control of the vehicle. I realized that we were in trouble when the car headed for a shallow ravine. In that brief moment the only prayer that I was able to shout was "Lord, please save us!"

Instantly, as if being carried by angels, the car spun out of the ravine and landed back on the opposite side of the interstate facing oncoming traffic. After pulling the car off the road, we both sat stunned but thankful that we were alive. We were startled by the state trooper knocking on the car window. "Are you guys all right?" he said. "You are lucky to survive that nasty spinout without any damage to your car,"

he shouted over the cars and trucks whizzing by. What he didn't understand was that luck did not save us; instead, it was God's watchful care and protection.

Many people view God as a celestial being that created the world

and left it to run on its own with no participation in the events that take place (deism). Therefore, our destiny is left to chance. In the life of a Christian there is no such concept as luck or chance. Our future is guided by the hands of a Creator who cares for us and takes an interest in our lives (Jer. 29:11). He is so invested in us that He was present at our conception (Ps. 139:13-16), counts the hairs on our head (Matt. 10:30), and when we sinned, He sacrificed His only Son so that we could be redeemed. This is not a God that leaves our existence to probability.

"Those who follow Christ are ever safe under His watchcare. Angels that excel in strength are sent from heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard which God has stationed about His people."*

Thank You, Lord, that You did not leave the earth to suffer alone without Your protection and care; instead, we are assured of Your salvation and redemption. Even when the enemy and his host may seem indestructible, I rest in the peace that You constantly protect and care for Your children.

* *The Truth About Angels*, p. 13.

Somewhere Down the Road

EVIDENCE

1 Cor. 13:12; Heb. 11:1

What if Joseph had not trusted God? What if he had given up faith?

He had dreamed that one day his family would all bow down to him. He believed that this dream was from God, but what if he had given up? What if he doubted God and cried out, "Forget it, God. You allowed me to be sold into slavery by my own flesh and blood, and now I quit." What if Joseph had lived the rest of his life bitter and angry with God? There would have been no Israelites to be saved by Moses. King David would not have lived or written the largest book in the Bible, Psalms. Jesus wouldn't have been born through Mary and Joseph since their great-great-great relatives would never have existed. A great part of the world celebrates Jesus' birth this time of the year. What if there were no Christmas, and work, school, and life continued on as if nothing had happened?

In spite of everything that happened to Joseph, he still trusted that God was in control. Our memory text for the week shows the incredible faith that Joseph had when he looked back on the situation years after he had been promoted from his role as Potiphar's slave. In Genesis 45:5 Joseph explains to his brothers why he isn't angry with them: " 'God sent me before you to preserve life' " (NKJV).

**What if Joseph had lived
the rest of his life bitter and
angry with God?**

God can see the end from the beginning. We cannot. Later, down the road of life, we can occasionally look back and see God's reasoning in taking us through different situations in life. However, it will only be in heaven that we can truly see how God was leading us all through our lives. "Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Cor. 13:12, NKJV).

Ellen White sums it up: "God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him."*

**The Desire of Ages*, pp. 224, 225.

Just Like Abraham. You Too!

HOW-TO

Gal. 3:8, 9

Read Galatians 3:8, 9. Why is it hard to believe that the blessings of "faithful Abraham" are still available for us today? Through the trials that many people face today, they feel discouraged. In the process of pointing them to the Problem Solver, you hear them say "That was then, but today . . ."

Today what? Yes, today it's even available to us.

What evidence do I have? Galatians 3:7 says, "Know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham" (NKJV). Yes, you too. God justified us through faith. He told Abraham, "'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (verses 8, 9, NKJV).

So in spite of how useless life may seem, we, like Abraham, can await God's enrichment in our lives. Here is what we have to do:

1. Expect. Expect that God has great plans for you. Read Jeremiah 29:11.

2. Believe. To have faith we must believe. And when we do have faith we please God. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6, NKJV).

3. Accept. It doesn't make sense to know that you're getting a gift and not collect it. Believing would be in vain. When one receives a gift nicely wrapped, they must first accept it to see what's inside. You may not know the gift or blessing that God has for you, but you must accept believing that He will give you a good gift. You may not get exactly what you were praying for, but trust that He is working it out for your good and that the best, though unseen, is there for you through His grace. Romans 8:28 says, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (NKJV).

So love God, and just like Abraham, you, too, can trust in His plans for you.

REACT

1. When receiving gifts, do you always need to know what it is before you accept it?

2. How much would you lose out on if you accept only gifts that you know the contents of?

3. How can you best help yourself and others appreciate the mystery of life?

A Series of Unfortunate Events or Blessings in Disguise?

Thursday
December 28

OPINION

Gen. 45:4-7; Deut. 30:1-3; Luke 21:28, 36

Before I became an Adventist, life seemed never to have hope. When bad times would come, all I could say is "Why me?" not knowing that these series of unfortunate events could be the biggest blessing in my life. One year before I was baptized I lost my father to his third heart attack. I stopped caring because I didn't have Jesus. Lacking hope, I started drinking. I drank during every meal, yes, even at breakfast.

My best friend was there for me throughout this devastating time. I didn't know how important that friendship would be. One day he turned to me and said, "Do you know Jesus?"

Shocked, I replied, "Of course I know about Jesus, He is the Son of God!"

"No!" he said. "Do you know Jesus?"

There is a difference between knowing and knowing about someone. He went on to tell me the truth about Jesus.

He informed me of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and confessed that he had fallen away from the church. Through experiencing and recognizing Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I was set free of my misery

**There is a difference
between knowing and
knowing about someone.**

and was no longer a slave to alcohol. I was baptized one year after my father's heart attack. Touched by my baptism, my best friend also was baptized.

Joseph recognized God as his only hope in his life. Despite the hardship he had to endure, He was faithful to his heavenly Father. It was because of this relationship that God blessed Joseph by placing him as lord over Pharaoh's household. But an even greater blessing was when he recognized his misfortune as being a blessing from God. You have to look at your series of unfortunate events in a new light and see how God is using them as a blessing in disguise.

Now that I look back on my misfortune, I see that they were all blessings. But a greater blessing was when my best friend, the very one who asked me if I knew Jesus, asked me another question: "Will you marry me?"

REACT

Are there any experiences that you thought to be unfortunate events that you now recognize as blessings from God?

EXPLORATION

2 Cor. 12:1–10

Did Joseph ever wonder, “Where in the world is God?” In the world as it is, there are many times when God just seems to be elsewhere, and bad things “just happen,” usually to “good people.” We could, if we chose, believe that God is absent, indifferent, or even hostile. On the other hand, we could blindly assume that everything is “God’s will.” However, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we know that God exists, that He cares, and that current situations may not be in accord with His perfect will. Yet it is God’s will to bless us in the midst of all situations we may encounter. The Bible shows us many instances when His people were blessed—and when they blessed others—in difficult circumstances. Let us take them as our examples, and in turn be examples for others.

CONSIDER

- Viewing photos from the latest disaster or war zone. What would you tell the people in these pictures if you could meet them face to face? What would you want to hear if you were in these situations?
- Reading how Christ’s suffering on the cross relates to human suffering. Was His suffering greater? Less? What can we learn from His experience as it applies to our own situations?
- Paraphrasing 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 in such a way that it applies to a difficult situation you may be encountering.
- Listening to or performing Steve Green’s song, “People Need the Lord.” In what way is Jesus the answer to the pain, fear, etc., that Green mentions? How has this been true for you?
- Volunteering at a soup kitchen, or joining an organization or event that addresses world hunger, one of the major sources of suffering in the world today.
- Offering to pray with people who are going through difficult situations or times. If you are not too obnoxious about it, you might be surprised at who will take you up on the offer.
- Keeping a prayer journal. Bother God with your problems and questions. Take note of what happens to the problems and/or your attitude toward them.

CONNECT

The Great Controversy, chap. 19.

Richard Rice, *When Bad Things Happen to God’s People*, chaps. 1, 2.

Alan Hecht, Takoma Park, Maryland

Next Quarter's Lessons

"Ecclesiastes: It's a God Thing"

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 2007, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: December 30–January 6

The Rise and Fall of the House of Solomon

Logos: 1 Kings 3:16–28; 11:1–43; 2 Chron. 6:1–42; 7:1–4

Memory Text: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48).

The Week at a Glance: This week, before we study Ecclesiastes itself, we'll look at the *Sitz im Leben*, "the life situation" of Solomon, which will help us understand why, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book as he did.

Lesson 2: January 6–13

Nothing New Under the Sun?

Logos: Ecclesiastes 1

Memory Text: "That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9, NKJV).

The Week at a Glance: Chapter 1 of Ecclesiastes introduces the book. It begins with a look at the futility and meaninglessness of life lived without the knowledge of God.

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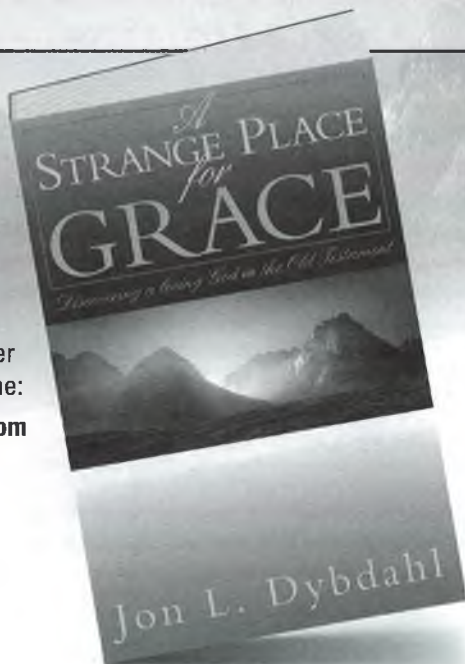
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MISSION PROFILE



**Robert Serwanga,
Bugema, Uganda**



East-Central Africa Division

Where legally possible, offerings will go to this division; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.

The fact that Robert is a college student is not unusual, but how he got there is.

Polio crippled Robert's legs, and he could not walk. His grandparents, who raised him, discouraged him, and children and adults laughed at him. But Robert was determined to learn and crawled two miles to the primary school every day.

Every day he prayed, "Help me get an education so I can help others with disabilities."

When Adventists held meetings in his town, Robert attended. He embraced the message and dedicated his life to serving Christ. But when his grandparents learned about it, they disowned him. He lived with the principal of the primary school, but he wondered how he would complete his education. God provided for him, and today Robert is completing his degree in social work.

"God gave me an attitude that I can do all things with God's help," Robert says. And he has proven that true.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help build a health center at Bugema University in Uganda. Read more about Robert Serwanga, a remarkably able young man, in the current *Mission* quarterly or visit www.adventistmission.org.



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