

# COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A North American Youth Ministries Publication

July-September 1985

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The *Collegiate Quarterly* is written by faculty, students, and friends of the Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in North America. Organized under the Union College Board of Trustees, it is coordinated by Campus Ministry and published with the approval of the North American Division Church Ministries Committee.

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# THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS Studies in Genesis

1. In the Beginning . . . God .....	8
2. From Chaos to Cosmos .....	20
3. Structured for Happiness .....	30
4. Enmity's Entrance .....	40
5. A New Beginning .....	48
6. A City Called Confusion .....	56
7. The Chosen Family: An Epic Begins .....	66
8. Abraham: An Epic of Faith .....	76
9. Abraham: An Epic of Faith, Part II .....	84
10. Jacob: An Epic of Conflict .....	92
11. Jacob: An Epic of Conflict, Part II .....	100
12. Joseph: An Epic of Destiny .....	108
13. Joseph: An Epic of Destiny, Part II .....	118

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**Leanne Kaiser** is 19 years old and a sophomore attending Union College. She has numerous interests including communication, the fine arts, creative photography, backpacking, and travel. She served as Senior Class President at Campion Academy and was the recipient of the Josten's Foundation Scholarship for Academic and Leadership Ability.

Leanne is looking forward to being a student missionary as part of her college curriculum. She believes in the Lord's soon return and would like to have a part in the final preparation for that great day.

As an illustrator for this quarterly, Leanne has used symbol and silhouette to communicate spiritual insights found in the lessons. She hopes you will enjoy the illustrations as much as she enjoyed preparing them for you.

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

## Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is based on the conviction that there is transforming power in the Word of God and that one important way of tapping into that power is through group study. It is prepared with Adventist college students and young adults particularly in mind. Its purpose is to provide this group with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed together each week in Sabbath School.

Additionally, many who use the adult quarterly find that the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, since it deals with the same topics as the adult, enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist colleges and universities, along with young adult church groups, work together in producing the quarterly. The writing at each school is coordinated by the campus chaplain's office. Approximately 200 individuals contribute to the quarterly each year, on a volunteer basis.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 22,000.

## Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold on the Introduction page (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly Introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

2. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the Logos pages (Monday's lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

3. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained by your own study of the biblical passage.

4. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

**Introduction** (Sunday) is designed to get your attention and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

**Logos** (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

**Testimony** (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

**Evidence** (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from an historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most "scholarly" article of the week.

**How To** (Thursday) discusses what the "theory" in the lesson means for day-to-day living.

**Opinion** (Friday) is a personal viewpoint on the lesson, meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

5. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

## The CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is the North American Division-approved quarterly for the collegiate/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.* Particularly in the Evidence and Opinion sections, views are expressed which are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions.



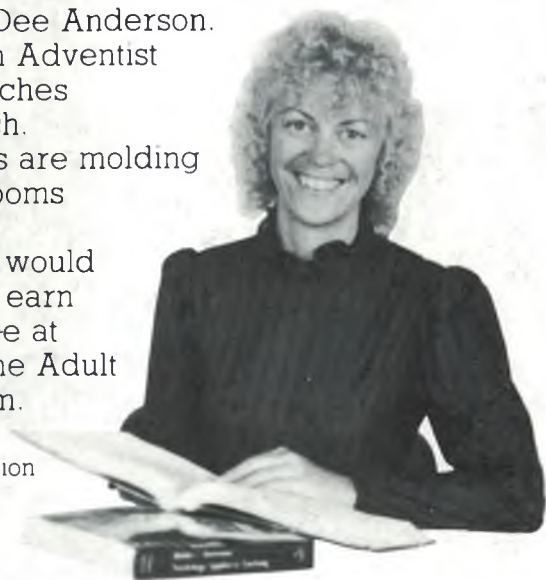
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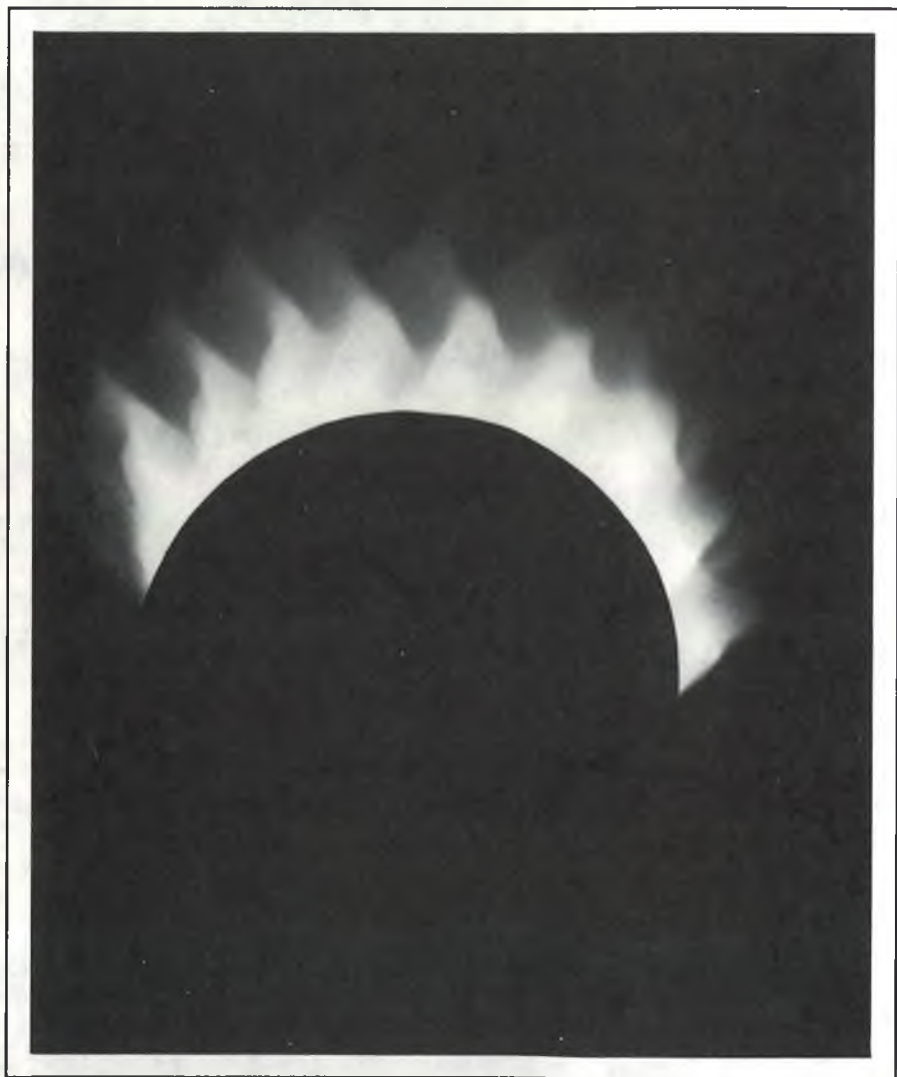


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# IN THE BEGINNING...GOD

“ ‘You are our Lord and our God, you are worthy of glory and honor and power, because you made all the universe and it was only by your will that everything was made and exists’ ” (Revelation 4:11, Jerusalem Bible).



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# This Is Your Story

His problem was not an unusual one: he thought studying history was worthless. So this University of Chicago Divinity School student went to the dean of the school (then the eminent church historian Sidney Mead) to try to talk his way out of a required church history course.

The student explained to Mead that history had no relevance for his life or his academic interest—contemporary philosophy. Mead responded, "Tell me, how did you become so interested in contemporary philosophy?"

"Well, Professor Mead," the student replied, "that would be a long story, and I'd hate to take up that much of your time. I'd have to go back to when I was in high school and explain what first sparked my interest and . . ."

"You just lost your case," Mead interrupted. As Mead went on to point out, the student could only explain his reason for not wanting to take history by telling his own history. We cannot explain who we are or why we are unless we know from where we have come, unless we know our history. Not just our personal history or our national history but our history as a human race.

Genesis, our topic for study this quarter, offers a starting point for that history which is so essential for human self-understanding. In the first

section of the book, the primeval history of chapters 1-11, the entire human family can find its identity, for we learn there where we have come from and to whom we belong, as well as the grim reality of the human condition.

In the patriarchal history of chapters 12-50, we find the epic saga of one family through whom God would work his universal purpose for the blessing of all humankind. In this saga we not only see the first moves in God's salvation strategy, but we also see what God can mean in the lives of individuals not all that unlike ourselves—an Abraham whose faith is erratic yet finally emerges as exemplary, a Jacob who schemes and manipulates yet learns to cling to God, a Joseph who is spoiled and naive yet won't give up on his dream or compromise it.

This book of beginnings is also the starting point for all the major themes of biblical faith. It gives us an indispensable basis for understanding the nature of God, man, sin, and redemption.

Genesis, then, is the beginning of your story. Without that beginning, life makes no sense. With that beginning, not just the remote past, but life as you face it today and are destined to face it in the future, is enlightened with a meaning that brings purpose and hope.

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture:**

**Genesis 1:1;  
3:1-24; 12:2, 3;  
15:6; 28:10-17,  
34:7, 8**

D. F. M.

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# A Book of Explanations and Hope

LOGOS

## GENESIS OUTLINE

### I. Primeval History (1-11)

- A. Creation (1:1-2:25)
- B. Sin and its results (3:1-5:32)
- C. The Flood and its aftermath (6:1-11:32)

### II. Patriarchal History (12-50)

- A. The Abraham story (12:1-25:18)
- B. The Jacob story (25:19-37:2)
- C. The Joseph story (37:2-50:26)

**Authorship:** Moses, according to Judeo-Christian tradition.

**Theme:** The book of Genesis offers an explanation for the world in which we live—its origin, its suffering and sin, and its hope for renewal.

#### 1. The Beginning Explained

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1, NIV).*

In simple yet majestic terms, the inspired author declares that the human story begins in the creative action of the one, sovereign, all-powerful God. And with this simple sentence all other explanations for the earth's existence are excluded. We are not here because of a faceless sequence of capricious happenstances but because of a Creator's loving design.

Scholars have noted similarities between the Genesis creation account and the ancient Babylonian Creation Epic, both in various details and in the sequence of events.<sup>1</sup> But much more significant is the striking contrast.

In the Babylonian (and Canaanite) accounts, creation comes about as a result of strife among the gods. The gods were the personified forces of nature, some exerting a chaotic power, others an ordering power. The world was thought to have been created through the triumph of the gods of order over the gods of chaos.

The God of the Genesis story, on the other hand, "is no personified force of nature or the sum of nature's powers. As the Creator his being is not identified with anything he has created. He stands above the world and independent of it. He does not need it to exist. Consequently, the biblical writer could not think of creation as the product of a struggle among the powers in nature. It was instead the marvelous work of the one God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the Lord of all he has made."<sup>2</sup>

*What implications does the fact that God is the originator and designer of life have for you personally?*

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## 2. Sin and Suffering Explained (read Gen. 3:1-24)

*"And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.' So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden . . ." (3:22, 23, NIV).*

If the primeval history in Genesis answers the question of how the world came into being by saying that it was the flawless design of a transcendent, loving Creator, then another question immediately arises: how did the world come to be in its present condition of subjugation to sin and death?

The Genesis answer is that humanity was cut off from life the way it was designed to be—was barred from Eden and the tree of life—through a free choice to be autonomous. Though already created in the image of God, the first man and woman grasped at the seductive promise that by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil they could rise above their creaturely dependence and be on the same level as God himself (3:1-7). The result of their rebellion against the source of life was that not only they, but also the creation which had been charged to their care, were brought under the dominion of sin, death and decay (3:14-19).

"The knowledge of good and evil—discerning, determining, controlling, and prescribing right and wrong, morality and immorality, salvation and perdition, life and death—is the unique attribute and exclusive prerogative of divinity. Man acquires it only at his peril. To have this awesome knowledge and responsibility—to be like God in this sense—and not *be* God, is man's undoing. As a created being, man is not the source of his own life; neither is he able to prolong or perpetuate it. Alienated from the Creator who made him, cut off from the God who sustains him, and incapable of bearing the burden of the knowledge of good and evil, man can only die."<sup>3</sup>

*Can you see yourself in the story of Adam and Eve's "fall?" In what ways? In what ways is your experience different from theirs? Is the sin and suffering in your life the result of their choice or your choice?*

## 3. Hope for Renewal

*"But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Gen. 3:9, NIV).*

God does not abandon his rebellious creatures, but he takes the initiative in restoring a right relationship. And he gives them a hope to live by, that one day the serpent, the source of temptation and evil, will be crushed (vs. 15).

## 4. The Means of Renewal (read Gen. 12:2, 3; 15:6; 28:10-17; 45:7, 8)

*"All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go,*

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*and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (28:14, 15, NIV).*

Having given us a backdrop for understanding the world in which we live, Genesis then begins the dramatic narrative of God’s redemptive involvement in the human situation—the outworking of his grand purpose for freeing the planet from the grip of sin and death.

God’s first step in accomplishing that purpose was to establish a special relationship, a covenant, with one family. The God of *creation* is also the God of the *covenant*, in which he promised the chosen that their offspring would be innumerable, that they would be given a land, that through them the covenant blessings would be brought to all people, and that his guiding, sustaining and unailing presence would be with them.

The Genesis account of this chosen family focuses on three main characters:

—Abraham, with whom the story begins, who believed when God promised (15:6) and moved when God directed (12:1-4), and thus became the “father of the faithful.”

—Jacob (“deceiver”) whose deeds often testified to the accuracy of his name, but who discovered that there was a stairway linking him to heaven (28:10-17). His relationship with God came to reach a new level and his name was changed to Israel (“struggler with God”), and he became father of the twelve tribes of the great nation of promise.

—Joseph, who found that adversity and opposition can not defeat one who is in a covenant relationship with God, but rather God uses such short-term setbacks to accomplish his long-range purposes.

*How effective was God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants as a means for accomplishing God’s purpose of bringing renewal to the earth? Why didn’t God move more quickly or dramatically to accomplish his purpose?*

D. F. M.

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A. Speiser, *Genesis*,  
The Anchor Bible, pp.  
9-11.

G. Ernest Wright and  
Reginald H. Fuller, *The  
Book of the Acts of God*,  
pp. 49, 50.

Charles C. Cochrane,  
*The Gospel According  
to Genesis*, p. 41.

# The Terrible Experiment

Every manifestation of creative power is an expression of infinite love. The sovereignty of God involves fullness of blessing to all created beings. . . .

The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love.<sup>1</sup>

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.

So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. . . . There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies. But a change came over this happy state. There was one who perverted the freedom that God had granted to His creatures. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. Lucifer, "son of the morning," was first of the covering cherubs, holy and undefiled. . . . "Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee." Ezekiel 28:12-15.<sup>2</sup>

Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages—a perpetual testimony to the nature of sin and its terrible results. The working out of Satan's rule, its effects upon both men and angels, would show what must be the fruit of setting aside the divine authority. It would testify that with the existence of God's government is bound up the well-being of all the creatures He has made. Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy beings, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin, and suffering its penalty.

He that ruleth in the heavens is the one who sees the end from the beginning—the one before whom the mysteries of the past and the future are alike outspread, and who, beyond the woe and darkness and ruin that sin has wrought, beholds the accomplishment of His own purposes of love and blessing. Though "clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne." Psalm 97:2, R.V. And this the inhabitants of the universe, both loyal and disloyal, will one day understand. "His work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." Deuteronomy 32:4.<sup>3</sup>

## TESTIMON

Key text:  
Psalm 33:6, 9

"Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God. . . ."

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 33.  
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 35.  
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 43.



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# Can Science Confirm the Genesis Story?

by David Show

## EVIDENCE

Key texts:

2 Thess. 2:15;

1 Thess. 5:21

Consider the following:

The so-called Big Bang theory makes some astronomers acutely uncomfortable, even while it ignites in many religious minds a small thrill of confirmation. Reason: The Big Bang theory sounds very much like the story that the Old Testament has been telling all along.<sup>1</sup>

The essential elements in the astronomical and Biblical accounts of Genesis are the same: The chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy.<sup>2</sup>

How do you react to such statements? Do you feel a thrill of confirmation for creation? Mild amusement that science is trying to understand origins? Or maybe disgust that evolutionary theories like the Big Bang could be so closely linked with the idea of creation?

I would like to throw out a word of caution to those who might be tempted to use statements like those quoted above to bolster their belief in creation. To do this let me illustrate how easily the scientific evidence behind those quotes could change.

The currently accepted model for the origin and development of our universe is roughly as follows: Billions of years ago, all the mass of the universe was concentrated into a single point. This point of mass exploded (the "Big Bang") spraying bits of matter and energy in all directions. These bits of matter grouped together under mutual gravitational attraction to form galaxies, stars, planets, etc.

The primary evidences for this model are: 1) the universe appears to be still expanding; and 2) in every direction they look, scientists observe the type of electromagnetic radiation (called the 3K background) which theorists predicted would be present if such an explosion took place.

There is, however, one aspect of the Big Bang model which might lead scientists to reject the idea of a beginning point in time. The mutual gravitational attraction of all the mass in the universe should slow down the expansion. If the total mass is great enough, then the expansion should be reversed and a contraction would begin. We could then end up with a model where the universe undergoes a series of cycles: explosion, expansion, contraction, explosion, expansion, contraction, etc.

Such a model is referred to as the "Oscillating Universe" model and the universe is said to be "closed." In the model theorizing the never ending expansion (not enough mass to stop the expansion) the universe is said to be "open." Now, with the closed model there is no beginning point in time, and the agreement with Genesis (such as it is) disappears.

Obviously, the crucial question for choosing between closed and

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David Show is the chairman of the division of science and math at Union College.

"Science by its very nature is always changing its view of the way things are."



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open is, Does enough mass exist in the universe to stop the expansion and begin the contraction? The current best estimates (based on actual measurements and well-educated guesses) say that the answer is "No." It is always possible, however, that enough new mass will be discovered to force a change to the closed model. In fact, it may have already been found.

Among the many bits of energy and matter in the universe is a class of particles called neutrinos. Ever since their theoretical prediction and subsequent experimental observation they have been believed to be massless. Recently, however, some experiments have been done which indicate that neutrinos do have some mass. So far the evidence is not firm (different experimenters have gotten conflicting results) but some physicists are beginning to believe that the neutrinos have mass—a very small amount to be sure, but nevertheless non-zero.

Now there are so many neutrinos in the universe that even if each one had only a tiny mass the total would be enough to tip the balance in favor of the closed (or oscillating) model of the universe. As we previously noted this would eliminate any apparent agreement with Genesis.

Science by its very nature is always changing its view of the way things are. What is currently accepted may be modified or totally rejected at a later time. Scientists (and most everyone else for that matter) believe that, in spite of the force of personalities and the biases present in all humans, the scientific process leads toward "truth." The problem is that it is often difficult to say just where we are along the path at the moment.

Christianity, on the other hand, holds that God has revealed certain truths to us through his inspired Word. It seems obvious that inspired revelation, when rightly understood, cannot conflict with the way things are in nature, when rightly understood. Nevertheless, there may be at any given time disagreement between the way the two are understood. The Christian must therefore be careful about what he takes as the basis for his faith. It is particularly dangerous to argue for biblical principles on the basis of science. For if the scientific model changes, the whole argument may topple.

Let the Christian establish his faith by his own careful study of Scripture and by his own personal experience with the Lord. While the testimony of others and even the evidence of science may prove helpful, truth for the Christian must be established personally by the study of Scripture and experience. By holding fast to that which is crucial for his salvation and keeping an open mind on peripheral issues, he will build for himself a solid foundation which cannot be undermined.

## REACT

Is there any rational basis for believing in God as Creator, or is it purely a matter of blind faith?

**"It is dangerous to argue for biblical principles because they are backed by science."**

1. *Time*, vol. 113, (Feb. 5, 1979), p. 149.  
2. *Reader's Digest*, vol. 117, (July, 1980) p. 49.

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# Quest for Meaning

by LeVerne Bissell

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Ecclesiastes**  
**1:2; 12:1**

“‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’”

says the Teacher.

“‘Utterly meaningless!

Everything is meaningless’” (Eccl. 1:2, NIV).

What a strange way to begin a book, and perhaps you're thinking, "What a strange way to begin this section of the *Collegiate Quarterly*!" Yet all of us have had times in our lives when everything seemed meaningless. Perhaps we had abandoned our lives to the search for pleasure only to discover in the end the fleeting nature of its thrills and the emptiness of its aftermath. Perhaps we had been caught up in the struggle for financial security only to discover with a shock, when contemplating life's ultimate moment, that we couldn't take our gain with us on that final journey into the unknown. Perhaps it was the loneliness and self-blame resulting from a friendship turned sour. Or maybe the cycle of daily living got to us; we seemed to be going in circles getting nowhere.

The author of Ecclesiastes grappled with the emptiness he found in his living. He filled his waking moments to the brim, trying everything possible to find some sense in existence. From expanding his mind to its ultimate in the search for life's philosophical underpinnings to exhausting his body with hard physical labor, from the seriousness of the quest for wisdom to the frivolity of hedonism—he tried it all only to conclude that everything was "utterly meaningless."

Without God there is no purpose for life. Yet many today have chosen to live in such a vacuum.

The author of beginnings never attempted to prove that God exists or multiply arguments in support of his assertion. He made a simple statement of fact—"In the beginning God"—a fact that we can either accept or reject. But our choice to accept or reject determines whether life is ultimately meaningful or meaningless to us.

If you would bring meaning into your life:

1. **Accept the fact of God's existence.** The only satisfying proof of his existence is the evidence born of your experience.

2. **Develop an intimate relationship with him.** Get acquainted with him through his created handiwork; learn more of him through his Word, especially through the Word made flesh.

3. **Let the Spirit hover over your life.** The Spirit that hovered over the earth to bring order and beauty from that which was "formless and empty" (Gen. 1:2, NIV), will bring meaning into your life.

The Teacher did find meaning. After trying everything else only to find it meaningless, he found God; and with God there was meaning. His counsel to posterity, to us today, is "Remember now thy Creator" (Eccl. 12:1).

## REACT

In what specific ways does belief in God bring meaning to life?

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# The Ultimate Question

by Jack W. Provonsha

T. S. Eliot encountered Britain's renowned agnostic philosopher, Bertrand Russell, on the street one day and asked him, "Lord Russell, what's it all about?" "And you know," he recounted later, "he couldn't tell me." Brilliant thinker, activist, writer of profound philosophical books and treatises, yet Russell had no answer to the ultimate question.

Adam Schaff, the Communist philosopher, stood before a class at Warsaw University when one of the students dropped a philosophical bombshell. "Please don't be angry, but could you explain the meaning of life, sir?"

"I first thought," said Schaff, "is he baiting me? But when I looked at the student and saw hundreds of pairs of eyes watching me attentively, I understood. This is serious. It was confirmed by the silence by which my explanations were followed. I admit that I was thinking out loud very feverishly. Until then I had rejected such subjects as so much blah blah. Communist thinking is ill-prepared to deal with these questions."

Donald Kalish of the Department of Philosophy at UCLA recently addressed a class of graduating students with, "you are mistaken to think that anyone ever had the answers. There are no answers. Be brave and face up to it."

Professor Schaff was right. This *is* serious. The question as to the meaning of existence is the most serious question of man. Not that everyone asks it. Unfortunately, most of the human race never raises its head long enough to look at the everlasting stars where such questions play.

When the ultimate question is posed, it is commonly asked at a secondary level taking the classical form of the three existential questions: Where do I come from? Why am I here? And where am I going? These are questions of origin, history, and destiny. They can also be asked in a corporate way—we, instead of I—adding a dimension of concern about community and interpersonal existence, but they do not essentially modify *the* ultimate question.

Asked in this way, however, as personal questions directed at the self and its place in the scheme of things, they uncover the reason why Professor Schaff had always considered such questions "as so much blah blah." Donald Kalish was also right—if we try to discover the meaning of existence merely within the context in which the question arises—namely *my* existence. To put it simply, I can never discover the meaning of *my* existence by exploring *me*—*my* past, *my* present, and *my* future.

The ultimate question is a question of existence *itself*—not merely a question of *my* existence. The questions relating to my existence presuppose a higher tier of questions relating to the larger ground from which personal existence emerges. At this higher level the question changes form. Instead of asking about ourselves we now come to ask about Being itself—about the nature and meaning of the larger reality which forms the ground of experienced phe-

## OPINION

Key text:  
Hebrews 1:1-3

**"The question as to the meaning of existence is the most serious question of man."**

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nomena—including myself.

Again *the* question may take three forms. One, sometimes called the ontological question, asks, "Why is there something and not nothing?" The second asks, "Is that 'something' essentially personal or impersonal?" And the third, "Is that 'something' (or someone) hostile or friendly?"

The first of these forms of *the* question need not detain us for the simple reason that it cannot be answered. It is similar to the question you may once have asked your mother, "Where did God *come* from?" She, of course, never really answered it. She could not. What has always been cannot come from anywhere. By definition, this question is irrational—what mathematicians might call a *surd* question. The ontological question is unnecessary in any case since it is self-evident that there *is* something and not nothing. We experience it in superabundance on every hand.

The second form of *the* existential question is another matter. "Is ultimate reality personal or impersonal?" (By personal is here meant the capacity for self-conscious awareness, intelligent reasoning, and the ability to act. In other words, it has to do with the ability to know what is going on, to understand it, and to do something about it—the things we refer to in relation to ourselves and each other when we speak of interpersonal interactions.)

Is the universe an endless extension of objects and forces with no meaning other than that they merely *are*? Or is there *Someone* out there?

Believers have found the evidence from history impressive if not always overwhelming. Is it not difficult, for example, to accept the marvelous orderliness of things as mere happenstance? Again, what is the most coherent explanation for the events in Palestine in the first century? And what of those personal events which have brought meaning to our individual lives? Such belief is not the result of being overwhelmed by evidence, to be sure. There will always be room for doubt. And maybe that's the point. Perhaps the exercise of choice and faith are essential.

But it *is* a serious matter. If the universe is an endless expanse of space, objects, and forces, if there is no *One* to hear and to respond to prayer, and we are really alone in the cosmos, then there is no answer to the question "what's it all about?" and Lord Russell was both wise and honest when he refused to invent one.

But if the record of the Bible and the witness of faith bear any resemblance to reality there *is* meaning, value, and purpose to existence. And then the third form of the ultimate question may be asked, "is ultimate reality friendly or hostile?"

It is easy to assume that such reality is hostile, given our common experience of things. Our immediate environment is a marvelous conjunction of things and events that render human life possible on this planet. There is an appropriate temperature range, the right amount of oxygen in our atmosphere, adequate moisture—

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"Belief is not the result of being overwhelmed by evidence."



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even moisture that expands rather than continuing to contract as it nears its freezing point, allowing freezing to occur at the surface of bodies of water where it can more readily thaw again. But outside of such narrow environmental limits, extremes of temperature, absence of moisture and proper atmosphere, searing exposure to radiation, all render life impossible.

Those exploding suns and those black holes sucking in even the light—they render most of the universe terrifyingly inhospitable to the life of man. And even within man's limits there is hostility enough—human pain and disease, natural disasters, social tragedy, crime on our city streets—to make one wonder.

But of course, none of these in themselves implies that ultimate reality is itself hostile. Certainly those exploding suns, searing radiation, and mysterious black holes do not necessarily imply hostility—except to do what might be out of place in them. Natural order and process require that each participant be in its intended place. Man as a part of nature has his appropriate place and function. It is in defiance of his created order that man encounters hostility—and that's what sin is all about.

But how do we know that the ultimate reality is friendly to man? Primarily because that is the face He discloses to us. This is the message of the incarnation in all of its dimensions, including the final consummation of things. "If ye see me ye have seen the Father," Jesus said as He drew man to Himself.

What then, is the meaning of existence? It has meaning as history, in the present moment, and in the future only because of the self-existent author of existence. One does not even ask the question if one considers only autonomous, self-sufficient man. Humanness is not what it's all about. There *are* no final answers if man is the measure of things. Existence derives its meaning from a personal, self-consistent and friendly God. His plan gives your life purpose and value. Apart from His purposes, each of us is doomed to "play with life as with a fretful child until it falls asleep," as Stanley Jones said. And what we have left is

*A wash of sand on the beach  
And we handle it soft  
And write our names on it  
The sand goes out, comes in,  
And there is no tomorrow,  
No yesterday,  
Everything is now.*

## REACT

Why doesn't God give more convincing empirical evidence for his existence and creative activity?

**"There are no final answers if man is the measure of things."**

Reprinted from *College People*, vol. 2, No. 2 (March, 1982), pp. 20, 21.

# FROM CHAOS TO COSMOS

"Yahweh, what variety you have created, arranging everything so wisely! Earth is completely full of things you have made" (Psalm 104:24, Jerusalem Bible).

## LOGOS



# For Me!

by Barbara Goyne

Sometimes it is hard to believe! All of this *for me!* As I wave my husband off to work for the new day, I take inventory. A wonderful sun-filled home, comfortably furnished. Outside, the treed lawn and flower beds. Four cherished, now-grown, children. A car for each and one for me. And so many extras I can't count them . . . the painting I spotted in Scotland, the plane tickets for our coming vacation, the birthday piano. . . . How could he put so much work into providing *for me*, except it be for love?

In Genesis 1, we are overwhelmed with the account of the great design and creation of a wondrous earth abundant with life, lovingly presented to man by God. Did Adam step back when he saw it all and exclaim, *for me?* The unknown time dedicated to specific design, the six days of creative energy, all focused *on him*. The unimaginable beauty, the interesting diversity, the joy of light and loveliness explained, as nothing else could, how much his Creator loved him.

And later, when all was lost, the Creator entered human life to save man. All of the energies and gifts of heaven have since been dedicated to restoration and re-

creation, all *for us*.

What light does Genesis 1 shed on our lives today? The love that brought man to life that week, still proclaims clearly that:

1. Each person is unique, created with potential to become the son or daughter of God. Inertia and entropy are swept aside as man aspires Godward, called by love.

2. Each person has a position in history. Gone is the nihilist specter of suspension in a meaningless void. God was there in the beginning, always has been, and is "my portion" now.

3. The Creator desires companionship with us. Mindless meditation is replaced by ennobling prayer.

4. This treasure-filled earth is designed *for us* to enjoy. Waste and destruction are tragic responses to such a gift.

5. All people are important and worthy of God's re-creative efforts. Race, caste, talent are dwarfed by brotherhood.

And that light penetrates the future. In the beginning God. . . . Therefore, at the end of human history, God. That end will really be just another beginning, another creation abounding in life and love . . . *for us!!*

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Genesis 1:2-31.

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# “He Spoke, and It Was Created”<sup>1</sup>

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Genesis 1 reveals God’s purpose and design for the created order and the distinctive identity he has given his human creatures.

### 1. Chaos

*“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep . . .” (Gen. 1:2, NIV).*

Genesis tells the creation story twice—using different literary forms and perspectives for each telling. The first telling (1:1-2:3), which we are studying this week, is a very concise, carefully structured literary unit. Its purpose is to convey truths about the divine origin of the earth and the God who made it. These truths stood over against the erroneous, polytheistic concepts of the ancient world, and they stand for us today as the unfailing foundation for all true understanding of the origin of the human family and its environment.

The story begins with chaos and ends with a cosmos—a perfect order resulting from six days of miraculous, creative action by God. During the first three days of creation week God created the structure, or *forms* in which life exists. During the last three days he animated the forms with life and detail, bringing *fullness* (see chart in Opinion section).

### 2. Cosmos—Forms (read Gen. 1:3-13)

*“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (1:3, NIV).*

God fashions order out of disorder by *speaking*. As other Old Testament writers confirm (see Ps. 33:6; Isa. 55:10, 11), the words that God speaks are much more than just sound waves produced by a voice box. Inherent in God’s word is the power which accomplishes that which is expressed.<sup>2</sup>

Creation by divine word thus indicates that God is unconditionally *sovereign*. Nothing can limit or obstruct that which he chooses to speak into reality. It also indicates that he is *personal*. A “force” cannot speak, but the personal, relational God of the Bible can.<sup>3</sup>

The creation of light on the first day *before* the creation of the sun on the fourth day counteracts the polytheistic notion that the sun, moon, and stars were divinities. God is the light that dispels the darkness of chaos, not the heavenly luminaries themselves. “By giving light, the symbol of the divine presence, precedence over the luminaries, there can be no question that the one true God is supreme over all.”<sup>4</sup>

The daily cycle of night and day also occurs on the first day, without the sun, moon and stars. Again the point has to do with God. *He* is the one responsible for the cycle of day and night, not the luminaries in the sky, though he later gives them the responsibility of regulating light and darkness (v. 18).<sup>5</sup>

*“And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse between the water to sepa-*

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rate water from water.' . . . And it was so. . . . God called the expanse 'sky.' . . . And God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so" (1:6, 8, 9, NIV).

By means of putting the sky in place, which the ancients compared to a solid, dome-like structure (see Ps. 104:2; Isa. 40:22), God brings order to the waters of chaos. They are separated and given boundaries. The sky holds back the water from above while the waters below are confined to the earth's surface. On the third day the waters below are given even more specific boundaries so that dry land can emerge. For the Old Testament writers, God's ability to hold the waters of the deep in check was a continual testimony to his sovereign power. Through Jeremiah the Lord declares, "I made the sea a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross" (Jer. 5:22, NIV).

What Bonhoeffer calls the "world of the fixed, the firm, the unchangeable, the unliving" came into being on the first three days.<sup>6</sup> Those aspects of the creation which do not change point us to the changelessness of the Creator's character and law.

*Does the creative power of God's word have continuing significance for us today? In what ways? What do the following passages suggest: Isa. 55:10, 11; John 1:1-3, 14; Heb. 1:1, 2?*

### 3. Cosmos—fullness (read Gen. 1:14-31)

"And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night.' . . . And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars" (1:14, 16, NIV).

God begins filling the forms he has created by putting lights in the sky, not only to provide illumination but to serve as a "cosmic clock, designating the calendar days and years."<sup>7</sup>

The author purposely avoided using the words, "sun" and "moon," instead employing the euphemisms "greater light" and "lesser light." Almost all the ancient polytheistic religions worshipped gods of the sun and the moon, and in many Semitic languages the word for the sun god was the same as the common word for sun. The terminology in v. 16 is thus for the purpose of avoiding any possible implication that the lights in the sky are themselves divine.<sup>8</sup>

"And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky'" (1:20, NIV).

What an incredible scene. In previously inanimate skies and waters, *life*, in all its marvelous color, variety and action, suddenly bursts forth.

An interesting detail in v. 21 gives another indication of the theological purpose of the creation story. Of the vast multitude of water creatures, only the great "sea monsters" (RSV), are specifi-

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cally mentioned. Precisely what these creatures were is unclear. But in the Babylonian and Canaanite mythologies, the sea monster was the evil force in the cosmic battle, whose defeat made creation possible. Even other Biblical writers used the symbolism of a battle in which God defeats the great dragon of the sea in establishing the created order (see Psalm 74 and Isaiah 51).

But in Genesis 1, the great sea monsters are stripped of all mythological qualities. Awesome as they may be, the sea monsters are not "divine opponents of God in the cosmic battle, they are merely his creatures sporting in the sea."<sup>9</sup> Again the thrust is the absolute uniqueness of God and the totality of his sovereignty.

*"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,' . . ."*

*"So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them."*

*"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (1:26, 27, 31, NIV).*

If God had stopped creating after bringing forth creatures to inhabit the dry land on the sixth day, he would have had a "good" world on his hands, a world that would have held tremendous fascination and enjoyment. But instead of stopping with the animals, he consummated his creative work with a being in his own image—man.

What constitutes the image of God in man?

1. *Personality*: God and man correspond to one another in that both are persons. Unlike any other creature, man has the capacity for person-to-person relationship with God. They can communicate.<sup>10</sup>

2. *Freedom*: Only a being capable of free, independent thought and decision can truly be in the image of the God who is sovereign over the entire universe.

3. *Regency*: The Lord rules the earth, but he has appointed man as his vice-regent over the rest of the created order. Man's lordship over his sphere was designed to be "based on the lordship of the Creator, from whom it derives. It is to be beneficent, gentle, and firm rather than tyrannical, despotic, and arbitrary."<sup>11</sup>

With human beings in the picture, God now had a world that was *very good* (v. 31). What a glorious heritage for you and me—life in all its dimensions comes from the hand of a sovereign Creator, who declares it "very good."

*What does v. 27 suggest to you about the relationship between the sexes? Does it have any implications for church and society today?*

D. F. M.

1. Psalm 33:9, *Jerusalem Bible*.
2. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall/Temptation*, p. 23.
3. Charles T. Fritsch, *The Book of Genesis*, Laymen's Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 22.
4. Larry G. Herr, "Genesis One in Historical-Critical Perspective," *Spectrum*, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 55.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Bonhoeffer, p. 29.
7. Fritsch, p. 24.
8. Herr, p. 58.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
10. Charles C. Cochran, *The Gospel According to Genesis*, p. 27.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

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# From the Hand of the Maker

As the earth came forth from the hand of its Maker, it was exceedingly beautiful. Its surface was diversified with mountains, hills, and plains, interspersed with noble rivers and lovely lakes; but the hills and mountains were not abrupt and rugged, abounding in terrific steeps and frightful chasms, as they now do; the sharp, ragged edges of earth's rocky framework were buried beneath the fruitful soil, which everywhere produced a luxuriant growth of verdure. There were no loathsome swamps or barren deserts. Graceful shrubs and delicate flowers greeted the eye at every turn. The heights were crowned with trees more majestic than any that now exist. The air, untainted by foul miasma, was clear and healthful. The entire landscape outvied in beauty the decorated grounds of the proudest palace. The angelic host viewed the scene with delight, and rejoiced at the wonderful works of God.

After the earth with its teeming animal and vegetable life had been called into existence, man, the crowning work of the Creator, and the one for whom the beautiful earth had been fitted up, was brought upon the stage of action. To him was given dominion over all that his eye could behold; for "God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over . . . all the earth. . . . So God created man in His own image; . . . male and female created He them." Here is clearly set forth the origin of the human race; and the divine record is so plainly stated that there is no occasion for erroneous conclusions. God created man in His own image. Here is no mystery. 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. Such teaching lowers the great work of the Creator to the level of man's narrow, earthly conceptions. Men are so intent upon excluding God from the sovereignty of the universe that they degrade man and defraud him of the dignity of his origin. He who set the starry worlds on high and tinted with delicate skill the flowers of the field, who filled the earth and the heavens with the wonders of His power, when He came to crown His glorious work, to place one in the midst to stand as ruler of the fair earth, did not fail to create a being worthy of the hand that gave him life. The genealogy of our race, as given by inspiration, traces back its origin, not to a line of developing germs, mollusks, and quadrupeds, but to the great Creator. Though formed from the dust, Adam was "the son of God." . . .

Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character. Christ alone is "the express image" (Hebrews 1:3) of the Father; but man was formed in the likeness of God. His nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things. His affections were pure; his appetites and passions were under the control of reason. He was holy and happy in bearing the image of God and in perfect obedience to His will.

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Genesis 1:31

**"The entire landscape outvied in beauty the decorated grounds of the proudest palace."**

Excerpted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 44, 45.



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# Divine Design and Change

by James L. Hayward, Jr.

**EVIDENCE**  
**Key text:**  
**Hebrews 11:3**

God is indisputably the subject of Genesis 1. Yet historically, few Christians have been content to take Genesis 1 as mere theology. Scholars have tried for centuries to wrest from the text answers to questions about creation itself. What happened? When and how did it occur? These queries continue to draw considerable comment.

Regrettably, some of the answers provided bring reproach upon the Christian cause. In a noble effort to elevate God's creatorship, believers sometimes deny the undeniable. This happens through a lack of understanding about the natural world, and failure to distinguish origin from process.

Scripture declares God to be the originator of life. This declaration is above argument. No one can devise an experiment to prove or disprove it. Questions of ultimate origin lie outside the realm of human endeavor. It is through faith and faith alone that we believe in God as Creator.

But while the origin of life is a divine mystery, we can say a great deal about the ongoing processes of life, and one such process is change. While post-creation is limited it undoubtedly occurs.<sup>1</sup> New species arise. Others face extinction. Distribution patterns are altered. In short, the living world exhibits constant flux.

The fact of change, so apparent to biologists, troubles many believers. Somehow it seems more appropriate that God should have made things to remain as they were created, unalterable evidences of the Master Designer. When acknowledgment of change does occur, it is often accompanied by apologies and excuses—a downplaying of the extent and significance of change. I am uncomfortable with this perspective for at least two reasons.

First, acceptance of change can help us account for the innumerable adaptations of organisms that seem inconsistent with the statement, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31, NIV). We do not know to what extent sin has influenced the process of change, but certainly the predatory adaptations of carnivores, the defense capabilities of prey, and the intricate structural and behavioral modalities of parasites represent post-creation alterations.

Second, everyone knows that organisms are finely-tuned to their environments, a fact frequently mentioned by creationists as evidence for a Designer. But we also know that environments change, sometimes naturally, other times because of human activity. Given the probability of environmental change, God would have been foolish to create organisms incapable of change themselves. Had he done so, most, if not all, living things would have followed the trilobites and dinosaurs into oblivion. The process of change, then, speaks eloquently for the wisdom of the creator God.

## REACT

How does the fact of constant change in the natural world affect your view of God as Designer and Creator?

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<sup>1</sup> See Harold W. Clark, *Genes and Genesis*, pp. 42, 58, 59 and *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 63.



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# Running the Maze

by James L. Hayward, Jr.

The grisly, hollow skulls peered mysteriously out of bullet-proof cases. I returned their stares and wished that I could extract their stories. When did they live? How did they communicate? Were their families like our families? What were their loves, fears, hopes and dreams?

I was visiting ANCESTORS, an unprecedented exhibit of rare fossil humans and human-like remains at the American Museum of Natural History in 1984. Many classic specimens were on display: *Australopithecus*, *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, Neanderthal Man and Cro-Magnon Man. The bones were on loan from several countries where they are considered national treasures. Proponents of human evolution felt that ANCESTORS dealt a crippling blow to creationists.

Indeed, the evidence presented in ANCESTORS raises the question of how to deal with information that appears contradictory to our faith. In my attempts to run the maze of scientific and religious thought, the following suggestions have been helpful:

1. **Remember that current interpretations of scientific evidence may change as new data accumulate.** For example, for more than a century geologists defended a strictly uniformitarian view of earth history. Today this view has been balanced by more emphasis on catastrophism, a position closer to a biblical perspective.

2. **Understand that our scriptural interpretations are sometimes incomplete or faulty.** Each of the following erroneous positions has been defended by Bible-believing Christians: "The universe is earth-centered"; "Fossils are 'jokes' of nature"; "Extinction is impossible"; "New species can never arise"; "Jupiter cannot have moons"; "God will never allow humans to set foot upon the lunar surface." If we are wise, we will not invoke biblical support for views about which Scripture is silent.

3. **Realize the importance of humility as we make progress in understanding.** Regrettably, some of the most acrimonious battles in Christianity have centered on issues in science and religion. One unfortunate example occurred during the 1940's within our own church. An influential science educator, incensed over a fellow Adventist's progressive views on geology, publicly blasted his colleague in a pamphlet entitled *Theories of Satanic Origin*. An official church investigation into the "heretical" views was even launched. After a time the dust settled and the newer views become incorporated into the church's published position. Progress had been made but not without infliction of unnecessary wounds.

4. **Recall that our faith in God's creatorship cannot be threatened by scientific investigation.** Questions about origins stand outside the province of science. The statement that God is Creator cannot be proved or disproved. Our faith in the divine origin of life is above argument. (See Evidence article.)

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Isaiah 48:18**

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# Poetic Description of the Creator God

by Fred Harder

## OPINION

Key text:  
1 Corinthians  
14:33

In the first 34 verses of the first book of the Bible Moses gives a description of God which has intrigued and appealed to every generation since his time. Such a description could only be written by someone with a living relationship with the true God. In his day others were talking of gods of wood or metal. Much later the Greeks would describe fiendish gods as constellations in the night sky. Throughout history men have described gods who enjoyed varying degrees of popularity before, in contrast to Moses' enduring description, being assigned to the scrap heap by lack of interest.

Moses reveals a dynamic, creative God. Everything this God does is "good." This God is permanent and transcendent and yet continuously caring for his creatures. This God is not chaotic or random (1 Cor. 14:33) but an organizer and a creator. The point is further emphasized by the fact that the description Moses gives is itself organized.

Two sets of parallelisms are evident as indicated by the chart on the adjacent page. The introduction depicts God moving; the conclusion declares that he is resting. On the first day God created light; on the fourth he furnished lightbearers. On the second day God arranged the firmament and waters; on the fifth day he supplied creatures to live in them. On the third day God provided the land to bring forth vegetation; on the sixth he produced creatures to live on the land and to eat the vegetation.<sup>1</sup>

Rhyming poetry, repetitive meter, and science fiction stories are art forms which we recognize much better than those used by Moses, but to his audience this was poetry. The canonizers must have perceived some of this when they placed this passage first in the Bible—a fitting introduction to the book about the "true God."

Let us use these lessons to get better acquainted with the creator God that Moses knew so well. Those who explore God's universe to learn God's methods will find new dimensions of God's nature as they do so, but let no one assume they fully understand God's creative genius based on this short passage.

## REACT

What is the relationship of science and Scripture in our understanding of creation?

1. This analysis and chart is part of a more complete study in *Bible for Today* by F. E. J. Harder, 1963, copyright Andrews University, pp. 30, 31.

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# Structural Chart for Genesis 1:1—2:3

## INTRODUCTION

### The Beginning

<b>God created</b>	the heavens the earth
<b>God moved</b>	on waters
Formless - Dark - Vacant	

## PREPARATION

Forming the formless  
Lighting the dark

<b>Light</b>	<b>1st Day</b>
Separated light from darkness	
Day & Night	

<b>Firmament</b>	<b>2nd Day</b>
Separated water from waters	
Heaven	

<b>Land</b>	<b>3rd Day</b>
Separated waters from land	
Seas & Earth	
Vegetation	

## FULFILLMENT

Filling the vacant

<b>Lights</b>	<b>4th Day</b>
Separate day from night	
To rule	Day & Night

<b>Firmament &amp; Water-Creatures</b>	<b>5th Day</b>
To move	in the waters
To fly	in the heaven

<b>Land Creatures</b>	<b>6th Day</b>
To live	on the earth
To eat	the vegetation
Separated man from other creatures	
Created	in God's image
To rule	all other creatures

## CONCLUSION

### The Finish

<b>God finished</b>	the heavens the earth
<b>God rested</b>	
<b>blessed</b>	the 7th day
<b>hallowed</b>	



# STRUCTURED FOR HAPPINESS

“The Lord God said: ‘It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him’ ” (Genesis 2:18, New American Bible).





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# Freedom In Structure

by Crystal A. Zagorsky

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Genesis 2

Creation gave structure and freedom to chaos. "In the beginning" Adam and Eve were given true freedom. Yet, there were structures given to every aspect of their domain. In the environment, there was the challenging structural task of naming and categorizing nature. In their personal relationship, they were given to each other through an ultimate and holy bond. In physical activity, they were to train and till the ground. In conscience, they had the decision of "The Tree."

In this perfect beginning structure was needed to bring happiness and freedom, and this structure meant that there were some actions that even perfect freedom could not do. God chose the structure and limitations of time, space, atoms and molecules to uniquely express himself. And he could offer no less than the same sacred challenge to Adam and Eve . . . to willingly accept their restriction in the Garden. Thus the need for "The Tree." Obedience was to moral structure as Creation was to physical structure.

Freedom of unique expression is always found within the present structures in which we find ourselves. This vital lesson God needed to teach his new Creation. Once that

uniqueness is expressed within structure, then our structures may change. *We never outgrow our need for structure, but we will for eternity, continually outgrow our structures.*

Webster's dictionary defines "structure" as the "arrangements of all parts of a whole . . . put together systematically . . . something composed of related parts." Structure is not virtuous in itself and does not live for itself. It must always point to higher purposes for its existence. God knew that human dominion over created structure would lead to creativity—an attribute of himself. To teach creativity was a purpose of created structure. We need never fear framework or structure, we need only to understand for what purpose it exists and where it is calling us.

In the Creation act, God structured all of Creation for happiness, a by-product of freedom. He combined the unseen realities with the seen. Adam and Eve, a "part," had the power to hold together the "whole" of Creation. Even perfect life needed framework to flourish. The entire structure of Creation uniquely expressed many great realities. And one of the greatest was freedom . . . to be . . . and become.

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# The Perfect Beginning

## LOGOS

**Theme:** God structured human existence with a pleasant environment (the Garden), meaningful activity (caring for the Garden), rest (the Sabbath) and intimacy (marriage).

### 1. A Pleasant Environment (read Gen. 2:4-14)

*"Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden . . ." (Gen. 2:8-10, NIV).*

God's intention for humankind can perhaps best be discovered by examining man's condition as he came directly from the hand of God. In Genesis 2, we find at least four significant factors of life as God designed it that are essential for ideal human existence.

The first factor was that of a pleasant environment. The contrast with our urban age, in which unadulterated natural surroundings are non-existent for a vast majority of the world's population, is striking. Matthew Henry observes:

*"The place appointed for Adam's residence was a garden; not an ivory house nor a palace overlaid with gold, but a garden, furnished and adorned by nature, not by art. What little reason have men to be proud of stately and magnificent buildings, when it was the happiness of man in innocency that he needed none! As clothes came in with sin, so did houses. The heaven was the roof of Adam's house, and never was any roof so curiously ceiled and painted. The earth was his floor, and never was any floor so richly inlaid. The shadow of the trees was his retirement. . . . The better we can accommodate ourselves to plain things, and the less we indulge ourselves with those artificial delights which have been invented to gratify men's pride and luxury, the nearer we approach to a state of innocency. Nature is content with a little and that which is most natural, grace with less, but lust with nothing."*

*Do you agree with Henry's inference that greater possessions/luxuries actually decrease happiness? If so, what is your rationale? Is it that way with you?*

*Should we be striving for an Eden-like existence in every respect?*

### 2. Meaningful Activity (read Gen. 2:15, 19, 20)

*"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15, NIV).*

Adam was not given the tasks of naming the animals and caring for the garden simply to occupy his spare time. Man has a physiological and psychological need to work, and God thus supplied a way to satisfy that need. "As nature was created for man, it was his vocation not only to ennoble it by his work, to make it subservient to himself, but also to raise it into the sphere of the spirit and fur-

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ther its glorification. This applied not merely to the soil beyond the limits of paradise, but to the garden itself, which, although the most perfect portion of the terrestrial creation, was nevertheless susceptible of development, and which was allotted to man, in order that by his care and culture he might make it into a transparent mirror of the glory of the Creator."<sup>2</sup>

*Does the responsibility given Adam and Eve for their environment suggest anything about our responsibility for our environment?*

### 3. Rest (read Gen. 2:2, 3)

*"And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gen. 2:3, NIV).*

To prevent the activity from becoming an endless cycle, and to provide for man's regular rest and renewal, God created the Sabbath. In addition to rest, the Sabbath would give man a special opportunity to devote all of his attention to his Creator, and thereby his own improvement. "God could have had no higher reason for enjoining upon man rest on the seventh day than that by so resting man might enjoy the opportunity of reflecting upon the love and goodness of his Creator, and so become like him."<sup>3</sup> If this was necessary for man in his unfallen state, how much more important it must have become after man became sinful.

God intended that the Sabbath be a spiritual filling station whereby we receive complete rest—physical, mental, and spiritual.

*What is the function of the Sabbath in your life? Does it serve a role beyond that of mere physical rest?*

### 4. Intimacy (read Gen. 2:18, 20-26)

*"Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:22, NIV).*

Adam felt the last of these four basic needs as he was naming the animals. The animal species were in pairs, but he had no companion. God had not overlooked this lack, but perhaps simply desired Adam to first feel his need, and thus more fully appreciate Eve.

The method whereby God created Eve is significant. ". . . The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."<sup>4</sup>

*What implications does God's manner of creating Eve have for women's liberation, the E.R.A., the role of women in the church, and other related issues?*

1. Matthew Henry's Commentary, vol. 1, p. 15.  
2. Keil, p. 84.  
3. Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 221.  
4. Henry, p. 20.



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# The Garden In Eden

## ESTIMONY

Key text:

Genesis 2:8, 9

Our first parents, though created innocent and holy, were not placed beyond the possibility of wrongdoing. God made them free moral agents, capable of appreciating the wisdom and benevolence of His character and the justice of His requirements, and with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience. They were to enjoy communion with God and with holy angels; but before they could be rendered eternally secure, their loyalty must be tested. At the very beginning of man's existence a check was placed upon the desire for self-indulgence, the fatal passion that lay at the foundation of Satan's fall. The tree of knowledge, which stood near the tree of life in the midst of the garden, was to be a test of the obedience, faith, and love of our first parents. While permitted to eat freely of every other tree, they were forbidden to taste of this, on pain of death. They were also to be exposed to the temptations of Satan; but if they endured the trial, they would finally be placed beyond his power, to enjoy perpetual favor with God.

**"True happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God."**

God placed man under law, as an indispensable condition of his very existence. He was a subject of the divine government, and there can be no government without law. God might have created man without the power to transgress His law; He might have withheld the hand of Adam from touching the forbidden fruit; but in that case man would have been, not a free moral agent, but a mere automaton. Without freedom of choice, his obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced. There could have been no development of character. . . .

The home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth. That home, beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace. Men, in their pride, delight in magnificent and costly edifices and glory in the works of their own hands; but God placed Adam in a garden. This was his dwelling. The blue heavens were its dome; the earth, with its delicate flowers and carpet of living green, was its floor; and the leafy branches of the goodly trees were its canopy. Its walls were hung with the most magnificent adornings—the handiwork of the great Master Artist. In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. If men would give less attention to the artificial, and would cultivate greater simplicity, they would come far nearer to answering the purpose of God in their creation. Pride and ambition are never satisfied, but those who are truly wise will find substantial and elevating pleasure in the sources of enjoyment that God has placed within the reach of all.

Excerpted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 48-50.



# Three Vital Components of Man's Existence

by Robert Helm

At creation, God realized that man's life must be structured if he were to reach his ideal potential. Consequently, God provided work (caring for the garden), rest (the Sabbath), and the family. These components of human existence were not designed merely for Adam and Eve but are also necessary if men and women today are to find true fulfillment.

According to Genesis 1:26, 27, man was created in the image of his Creator. Theologians often debate exactly what the "image of God" entails, but this phrase definitely suggests that man has the ability to pattern after his Creator. One way in which man patterns his Creator is in his work. The gift of work allows man to be creative in his own right and thus model the creative work of God. No one can allow his creativity to become stagnant and yet maintain the health of his total person.

However, constant work is not beneficial to man in that it has the tendency to place stress upon his system. It was for this reason that God provided the seventh day of the week as a day of rest. The Sabbath is not intended simply for man's physical refreshment, but is a day for spiritual renovation as well. On this day, man can contemplate God's will for his life and how he may best fulfill that will. Spiritual renovation is acquired through meditation on the goodness of God. For Adam and Eve before the fall, this goodness was demonstrated in the gift of creation; for us, God's goodness is also demonstrated in the gift of Jesus as our Saviour. Thus, in keeping the Sabbath, we are led to remember God's two great acts: creation and redemption.

The third component of man's existence given him at creation was the family. This institution provides a stable structure in which procreation and childrearing may take place. The family is the basic building block of society. If families are stable, society as a whole will be stable; if families are unstable, chaos will spread throughout society.

These three components of human existence, work, sabbath, and family, comprise the glue which holds human life together in an ordered form. Without them, life disintegrates into so many shattered pieces.

## REACT

1. Why does the health of those not employed in meaningful work (for example, those who retire early) often deteriorate?

2. Do you agree with the statement "if families are stable, society as a whole will be stable"?

## EVIDENCE Part 1

Key text:  
Genesis 2:15

"No one can allow his creativity to become stagnant and yet maintain the health of his total person."

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At the time of this writing Robert Helm was the youth pastor at Northridge, Calif. SDA church.

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# Earthkeeping

by Wes Granberg-Michaelson

## EVIDENCE Part 2

Key text:

Genesis 9:8-11

Despite a decade of heightened awareness of global environmental threats, with scores of international efforts to address specific problems and thousands of national and local laws and regulations adopted to protect the environment, the life-supporting ecosphere of our planet remains gravely and severely threatened.

First, humanity now possesses the power to destroy the creation. Jonathan Schell in *The Fate of the Earth* correctly identifies this as an ecological peril: "The nuclear peril is usually seen in isolation from the threats to other forms of life and their ecosystems, but in fact it should be seen as the very center of the ecological crisis."

Second, humanity is coming to possess an unprecedented power to create and manufacture new forms of life. This is not simply a neutral technological development. Rather, humanity's ability to alter the basic design of living things and bring into being totally new forms of life marks a watershed in our relationship to the creation.

In addition to the extremes of humanity's power over life and death of creation, the global environment evidences a continuing deterioration that results in large part from drains on its resource base by the lifestyle of an affluent minority. The prevailing model of economic development assumes that the resources of the earth have value only in their exploitation, that their supply is abundant, that humanity's role is to conquer the earth, and that the riches which result belong to those who do the exploiting. Global resource scarcity and threats to the earth's life-supporting capacity stem from this distortion in humanity's relationship to creation.

Is Christianity failing the world? Has it driven a wedge between humanity and the rest of nature, condoning the desecration of creation? What can our faith offer to shape and redeem humanity's relationship with creation? What theological questions have we left unattended, and what biblical resources lie untapped and unexplored?

First we must look freshly at the Genesis account of the world's beginning and the relationship between God, creation and humanity. In Genesis, the account of God's relationship with creation, and humanity's role, begins with the creation story and continues on through the ninth chapter, culminating in the story of Noah and the flood.

The central point in the story of Noah and the ark . . . is the covenant established by God with "living things of every kind." Here is where God's covenant promises first begin. And God's covenant is established not just with people; it is a covenant with all creation.

In Genesis, the story of creation is completed with the assurance of God's faithful and saving relationship to the world. Indeed, some modern theology argues that creation can only be understood through covenant. From the outset of the biblical account, then, we are cautioned against any view which assumes that the created world is nothing more than the stage on which the drama between

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"Violence toward others and rebellion against God alienate us from creation."

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God and humanity takes place. The rainbow reminds us that the creation is central to that drama, and that the promises given by God are directed not only to humanity, but to the creation that upholds all life.

Second, in the biblical understanding, rebellion against God and violence toward one another and harmony with creation are all parts of an interdependent web of relationships. Brokenness at one point affects the other parts.

Enmity and violence escalate following Abel's murder, and infect all of creation. By the time of Noah, God declares, "The loathsomeness of all mankind has become plain to me, for through them the earth is full of violence" (Genesis 6:13).

This theme of humanity's violence and rebellion marring creation continues in the Old Testament [see Isaiah 24:4, 5; Hosea 4:1-3].

Biblically speaking, then, violence toward others and rebellion against God alienate us from creation—and can even destroy the earth's fruitfulness and life-supporting capacity. Our misuse of the creation breeds enmity between us and other people, and alienates us from God.

Given that God has established a covenant with all creation; that God, humanity, and the creation are bound together in an interdependent relationship; and that the creation is an expression of God, and its destiny lies in relationship to God, it follows that God's work of redemption through Christ extends to the creation.

Sin breaks the intended fellowship and harmonious relationship between God, humanity, and the creation. The reign of sin and death alienates God from humanity and the creation, and propels the earth toward self-destruction. But in Christ, the power of sin and death is confronted and overcome. The creation is reconciled to God. This, I believe, is the full meaning of Paul's statement that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The church is that part of creation which has accepted God's redemption and salvation. Therefore, the church's life is to evidence signs of a restored relationship between humanity, the creation, and God. The redemption of the whole creation begins to be known, then, in the church. That is why Paul writes in Romans that the whole created universe yearns with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. As the body of Christ, the logos of creation, we are to live out a new and restored relationship to the creation, which itself has been won back to God by Christ's redemptive death and resurrection.

## REACT

What are some implications of this interdependent relationship between God, humanity, and creation?

**"The redemption of the whole creation begins to be known, then, in the church."**

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# God and the "Good Life"

by Mark Williams

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Psalms 84:11**

In the business of life, with its vexing problems and limited access to all the "right" answers, it is well to occasionally step back and remember that God is a giver of good things. "No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless" (Psalm 84:11, NIV). Genesis 2 is a record of God's supreme efforts to give us the "good life" in its fullest dimensions. Here are some suggestions to aid you in experiencing the "good life" God offers.

1. **Exercise daily, outdoors, and in all seasons.** There is no better way to see the detail of the pleasant environment that God has provided. You will discover the vast potential of your body to adapt to increasing exercise, and you will be amazed at the insights into creation that will open to you. In the nooks and crannies of city sidewalks, or on an open trail or country road, you will begin to taste the harmony between your body and the rest of God's creation, even in the midst of winter's cold or summer's heat.

2. **See, and apply, the value that God has placed on meaningful human activity.** Adam's duties of tending the garden and naming the animals, as well as the duties of the youthful Jesus, are examples of God's will for us. "The true joy of life is found only by the working men and women."<sup>1</sup>

Avoid both looking on another person's task as less important than your own and denigrating the importance of the work you have been given.

3. **Give priority to the simple basic virtues** of family communication and observance of the Sabbath as a "rest," much as Adam did. Concentrate less on the artificial elements of our society, such as TV and the latest fads. It is easy to allow peer pressure and societal trends to take valuable time. But let us remember that the Sabbath is the "tithe" of our time to our Creator. Relationships, both human and heavenly, are better developed in planned concentrated periods of time.

4. **Choose not to pursue those activities and objects which God has forbidden.** A careful, prayerful reading of Scripture will demonstrate that God's strictures and allowances are in our best interest. Make the "good things" that God has provided the object of your attention, and you will automatically place yourself at a distance from the "forbidden things." You will then develop a lifestyle which will bring peace of mind, and open opportunities that God has planned for you.

## REACT

Does all modern labor fulfill the same function for us that God designed Adam and Eve's activity to fulfill for them? How do we insure that the component of "meaningful activity" is in place in our lives?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 50.

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# Why Not the Best?

by Steve Mitchell

## OPINION

Key text:

Hebrews 6:9-12

The world-renowned orchestra conductor, Carlo Maria Giulini, made a statement in an interview once that has always intrigued me. In discussing his philosophy of conducting orchestral music, he said, "I think we need to abolish the word 'good' from our vocabulary as musicians. For us, there is never good, only *better*." Giulini is never totally satisfied with a performance. He seeks to convince the orchestra to continually strive for that which the composer's genius initially envisioned.

I wonder if Genesis 2 suggests a Christian parallel to Giulini's philosophy. As we have seen thus far this week, Genesis 2 presents the original plan for human existence. It gives us the composer's ideal for our happiness.

With the entrance of sin, God's people have fallen away from his original design, yet they still have the freedom of choice to live in harmony with it. Why then do so few of God's people today live in accordance with the guidelines of Genesis 2? Why are we almost eager at times to make excuses for our subpar living habits? Some people argue that it's O.K. to eat a little meat and drink a little wine, since after all, the race has been degenerated by thousands of years of sin, hasn't it? After all, both are biblical, aren't they (Gen. 9:3; 1 Tim. 5:23)? And deviations from the marriage institution such as divorce in some circumstances are certainly O.K. Moses, Jesus and Paul all made allowances for it, didn't they (Deut. 24:1; Matt. 5:31, 32; 1 Cor. 7:15)?

Under Giulini's philosophy, his orchestras strive for excellence—to recreate as well as possible the composer's work as it was originally intended. It is only then that the orchestra and conductor can achieve musical fulfillment. It is the same with a Christian. True fulfillment comes only by seeking to follow God's ideal plan revealed in the Creation story. The Bible never gives sin as an excuse for falling short of the goal. It's an impediment, yes, but not an excuse. God is waiting for a people willing to be free from sin and its compromises, ready and anxious to inherit the earth made new. It's time for Christians to put away the word "good." It is time to strive for the *better*. Indeed, for the *best*.

## REACT

1. Are the biblical passages referred to to be understood as God changing his original plan? Are they compromises for sinful people?

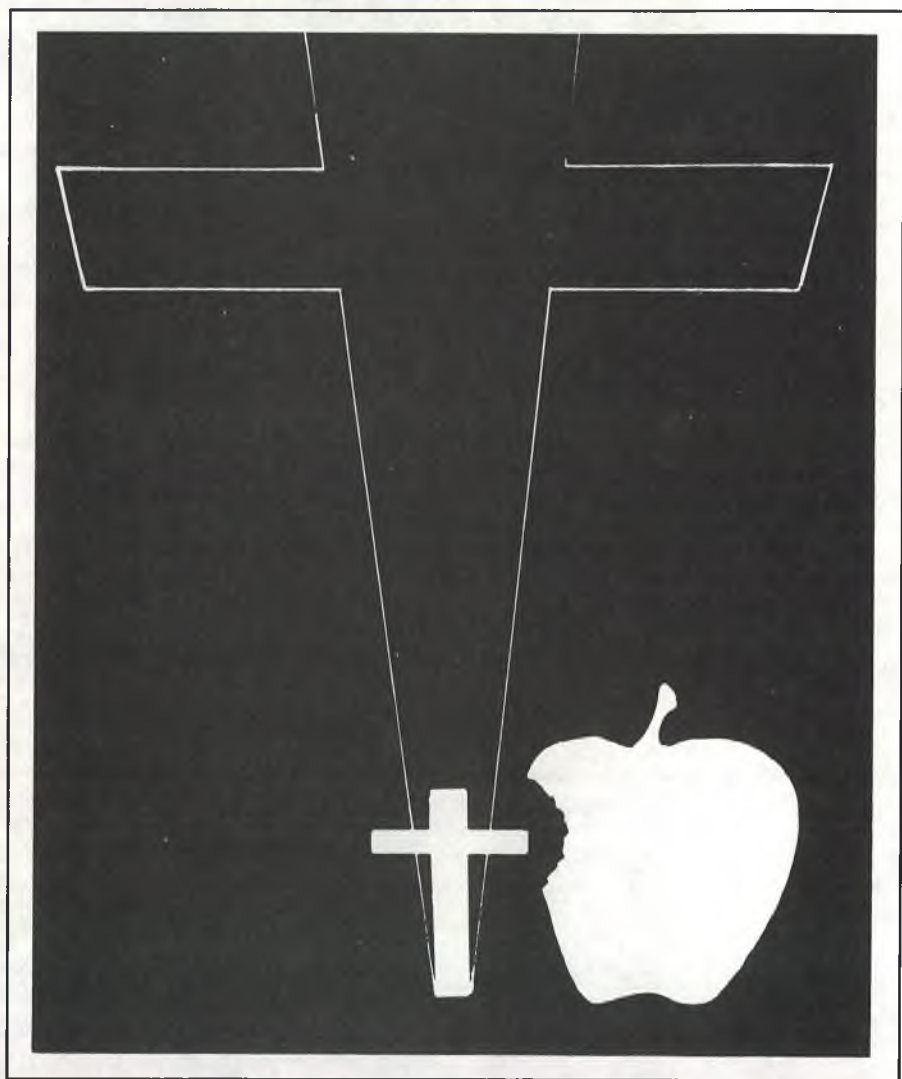
2. In music, there are some who choose to reinterpret a work—perform it differently, edit it, transpose or transcribe it to other instruments or settings, due to the changing mood and method of the age. Is there room for reinterpretation of Genesis 2? If so, how would you do it?

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# ENMITY'S ENTRANCE

“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17, NIV).





# The Fall As Current Events

by Gayland Richardson

Some years ago a young granddaughter went to Washington, D.C. to visit her grandparents. The grandfather did what any good granddaddy would do—he took her to the nation's zoo, and there the tragedy happened. The little girl got away from her grandfather's side and squeezed under the rail that keeps people a safe distance from the lion's cage. That powerful animal reached out and pulled the little girl into the cage and as the horrified grandfather watched, killed the child. The people around him kept hearing the man repeat over and over again in his shock, the little girl's last words, "I like to hold my own hand, granddad."

The lesson for this week tells the story of how it all began—that desire we have to hold our own hand. The tendency is to read it in terms of winged serpents and magic apples with a cosmic symphony doing the sound track. But change the tense from past to present and set this scene: A full moon, Donna Summer soft but insistent on the stereo, an inviting back seat, and this time the line is, "If you really love me. . . ." Or picture a party, the group is "in" and the refreshments are "far out." The story of the fall is not just history, it is current events.

The story tells of Eve's conversation with Satan and then records Adam's lack of courage to stand for what he knew to be right. C. S. Lewis makes

an interesting observation about the importance of courage when faced with temptation: ". . . Courage is not simply *one* of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality. A chastity or honesty or mercy which yields to danger will be chaste or honest or merciful only on conditions. Pilate was merciful till it became risky."<sup>1</sup>

The lesson goes on to look at the feelings of shame that came with the sin. The hiding behind fig leaves is certainly symbolic. But think about how you try to hide your guilt and the defense mechanisms you employ. Perhaps a fig leaf of religious activities to replace a meaningful relationship?

We also come to the record of the first evangelistic campaign. There are no handbills or TV ads. Instead we find God speaking personally to Adam and Eve about their fears. The important point is to notice the searching God and to think about the places we go to hide from God. The question, "Where are you?" is also addressed to us.

Finally we look at the ramifications of that first series of wrong choices and find heartache, pain and death to be the results. Yet, look closely and you will find hope.

As you study this passage, why not rewrite it with yourself in the center of the action, for this is not just a fairy tale history—this is the story of your life this week.

**INTRODUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**Genesis 3, 4**

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters and Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, pp. 137, 138.

Gayland Richardson is the pastor of the Alhambra, Calif. SDA church.

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# The Turn Toward Tragedy

## LOGOS

Theme: Adam and Eve's rebellion led to alienation from God, from each other, and from their environment, but God took the initiative in seeking them out and providing a way of reconciliation.

### 1. The Rebellion (read Gen. 3:1-7)

*"'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (3:4-6, NIV).*

Here is described the first great turning point in human history—an event which was to adversely affect every subsequent event. It was a dialogue between Eve and a curious talking serpent in the center of the garden, near the prohibited tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan, in the person of the serpent, was undoubtedly well-prepared for this encounter, for he field-tested one of his classic methods of temptation—with resounding success. "He questioned whether it was a sin or not (v. 1). He denied that there was any danger in it (v. 4). He suggested much advantage by it (v. 5)."<sup>1</sup> This method works splendidly for Satan today as well.

It must be emphasized, however, that despite the cleverness of the serpent's arguments, his delusion could and should have been detected. "The trial of our first progenitors was ordained by God, because probation was essential to their spiritual development and self-determination. But as He did not desire that they should be tempted to their fall, He would not suffer Satan to tempt them in a way which should surpass their human capacity. The tempted might therefore have resisted the tempter. If, instead of approaching them in the form of a celestial being, in the likeness of God, he came in that of a creature, not only far inferior to God, but far below themselves, they could have no excuse for allowing a mere animal to persuade them to break the commandment of God. For they had been made to have dominion over the beasts, and not to take their own law from them."<sup>2</sup>

Also significant is the fact that Eve's being overwhelmed by temptation did not alone doom the whole human race. "Deplorable as was Eve's transgression and fraught as it was with potential woe for the human family, her choice did not necessarily involve the race in the penalty for her transgression. It was the deliberate choice of Adam, in the full understanding of an express command of God—rather than hers—that made sin and death the inevitable lot of mankind."<sup>3</sup>

*Is temptation harder to resist today than it was in the Garden?*

*Why didn't God alter man's make-up, since in his foreknowledge he knew that man would fall? How does God's knowledge of the future affect his interaction with human beings?*

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## 2. The Response (read Gen. 3:8-24)

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

The euphoria of indulged sin quickly fades for Adam and Eve—and their apparently hopeless plight grips them as they await God's response. It comes quickly but without the harshness anticipated. The universal judge calmly questions them, listens to their excuses, and then proclaims the sentence: another chance, but under far different conditions.

Though Adam and Eve have chosen sin, God, by putting enmity between them and the serpent, makes it possible for them to resist being dominated by sin. Thus, "there is a continual conflict between grace and corruption in the hearts of God's people. Satan, by their corruptions, assaults them, buffets them, sifts them, and seeks to devour them; they, by the exercise of their graces, resist him, wrestle with him, quench his fiery darts, force him to flee from them. Heaven and hell can never be reconciled . . . [instead] a gracious promise is here made of Christ, as the deliverer of fallen man from the power of Satan. Though what was said was addressed to the serpent, yet it was said in the hearing of our first parents, who, doubtless, took the hints of grace here given them, and saw a door of hope opened to them. . . . No sooner was the wound given than the remedy was provided and revealed."<sup>4</sup>

## 3. The Ramifications (read Gen. 4)

*"And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him" (4:8, NIV).*

The natural results of sin were not long in coming. Conflict between good and evil became increasingly apparent—in the natural world and in human relationships. The abrupt fall from innocence is most clearly witnessed by Cain's murder of his brother Abel. "Enmity between good and evil, predicted by God before the expulsion from the garden, was seen now for the first time in its most horrible form. Twice in this verse [8] the words 'his brother' are added to the name of Abel to bring out clearly the horror of Cain's sin. In him the seed of the woman had already become the seed of the serpent. . . . Already there had sprung up that contrast of two distinct 'seeds' within the human race, a contrast that runs through the entire history of mankind."<sup>5</sup>

*What are the implications of God's treatment of Cain? Was redemption possible for Cain and his descendants?* L. R. C.

1. *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 22.  
2. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 94-94.  
3. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 231.  
4. Henry, p. 3.  
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 240.



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# A Battle or a Test?

by Gayland Richardson

## TESTIMONY

Key Text:

Genesis 3:1-13

Ellen White makes repeated references to the chain of events we speak of as "the fall of man." These references come from two basic perspectives, the first of which says that a simple test was all that was involved. The following quote from *Patriarchs and Prophets* is a good example.

"The tide of woe that flowed from the transgression of our first parents is regarded by many as too awful a consequence for so small a sin, and they impeach the wisdom and justice of God in His dealings with man. But if they would look more deeply into this question, they might discern their error. God created man after His own likeness, free from sin. The earth was to be peopled with beings only a little lower than the angels; but their obedience must be tested; for God would not permit the world to be filled with those who would disregard His law. Yet, in His great mercy, He appointed Adam no severe test. And the very lightness of the prohibition made the sin exceedingly great. If Adam could not bear the smallest of tests, he could not have endured a greater trial had he been entrusted with higher responsibilities.

"Yet, in His  
great mercy, He  
appointed Adam  
no severe test."

"Had some great test been appointed Adam, then those whose hearts incline to evil would have excused themselves by saying, 'This is a trivial matter, and God is not so particular about little things.' And there would be continual transgression in things looked upon as small, . . . But the Lord has made it evident that sin in any degree is offensive to Him."<sup>1</sup>

The second perspective suggests a larger issue with very profound and far-reaching effects. This example also comes from *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

"It was not the will of God that the sinless pair should know aught of evil. . . . But, contrary to His command, they had eaten of the forbidden tree. . . . From that time the race would be afflicted by Satan's temptations. Instead of the happy labor heretofore appointed them, anxiety and toil were to be their lot. They would be subject to disappointment, grief, and pain, and finally to death.

"Under the curse of sin all nature was to witness to man of the character and results of rebellion against God."<sup>2</sup>

How are we to understand the issues and the significance of the choices of Eve and Adam? Was it a simple test or was it a major battle? The answer would seem to be "Yes" to both questions. The test itself was simple and clear cut—"This one tree is totally off limits under all circumstances." However, just as in many wars there are engagements fought by ordinary people in unheard of places that later turn out to be pivotal battles, so it was at the tree. The defeat turned out to be a disaster for the human race.

## REACT

Was there anything special about the tree and its fruit or could God just have easily used a rock or flower for the test?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 60, 61.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

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Gayland Richardson is pastor of the Alhambra, Calif. SDA church.

# Rise or Fall of Man?

by Erwin J. Joham

The most fundamental question regarding the Fall of Man is the question of its historicity. What is the historical value of the Genesis account of the Fall?

Today, the doctrines about a "Fall of Man" have been largely replaced by teachings about the "Rise of Man." That is true not just for people at large (i.e. secular society), but also within many traditional churches.

This view results from the attempts by many theologians to accommodate the Genesis account to the theory of evolution, as suggested by the following statement:

"The irrevocable 'faith-of-creation-or-theory-of-evolution' (characteristic of former days of controversy) now begins more and more to give way to the understanding and saving conviction of a 'theory-of-evolution-and-faith-of-creation.'"<sup>1</sup>

This new syncretism is accomplished by differentiating between the subject matter of the Bible and the world view it represents and is embedded in.<sup>2</sup> Theologians who hold this view do not take literally that Genesis story of man being created perfect and then degenerating by his own choice. Rather, they wrestle with the question of "homonization," the appearance of man and sin in the context of the evolution of the universe.

But I am convinced Genesis 1-3 has to be treated as history if the rest of Scripture is to be taken seriously as the revelation of God's plan for a sin-stricken world. The doctrine of man's Fall is fundamental to the understanding and teaching of every crucial theological category: biblical anthropology (man estranged from God and in need of re-creation), christology (God became man to regain what Adam lost), eschatology (the goal of salvation is the restoration of Eden), and soteriology (man chose to fall into sin, and God chose to redeem him).

Strip the Fall of Man of its historicity and see if you have a man left who is responsible for his sin, or a God becoming man, or a Paradise to be restored, or sin to be removed once and for all.

E. A. Speiser sums up his exposition of the first chapters of Genesis:

"As a whole, then, our narrative [Gen. 1-3] is synthetic and stratified. Thanks, however, to the genius of the author, it was to become an unforgettable contribution to the literature of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Strip the first three chapters of the Bible of its historicity and instead of a basis for discussion of man's sin, his responsibility, and radical need for salvation, what you have left is an "unforgettable contribution to the literature of the world."

## REACT

Can the historicity of Genesis 1-3 be proven or disproven? If the evidence seemed overwhelming against the historicity of these chapters, how would it affect your faith? Your view of the Bible?

## EVIDENCE

Key Text:

Romans 5:17-19

**"Genesis 1-3 has to be treated as history if the rest of Scripture is to be taken seriously."**

1. Paul Overhage and Karl Rahner, *Das Problem der Hominisation: Ueber den biologische Ursprung des Menschen*, p. 5. (Authc translation).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

3. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible p. 28.

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# “Like God?”

by Jeff Lopez

## HOW TO

Key Text:

Ephesians 2:14

A few days ago I watched a man on TV teaching yoga meditation techniques. What he said was indicative of modern society's orientation. I don't remember his speech word-for-word, but it was something like this: "Everything you need to be successful is inside of you. Unlimited potential and energy are yours simply by getting in touch with yourself." According to his philosophy, we only need ourselves. According to the world today, you are the answer to your search for peace and satisfaction because the answer lies within yourself.

This solution isn't a new one. In fact, it is just an echo of Satan's words to Eve: "You won't die. You will become like gods." He was right. Eve ate and as a result mankind worships at its own image. "Just look inside and you will find god."

When Eve ate the fruit she changed psychologically. She became separated from God and from herself. Instead of being a unified being, she suddenly became a person with two desires, one for good and another for evil. The resulting struggle between the two has troubled us ever since. Part of the human experience is the feeling of being at odds with one's self—of not having it all together. This evidently was Paul's dilemma in Romans 7. He said, "I do what I don't like, and what I want to do, I don't." His solution is the only one that really works. He didn't look inside for answers, but instead turned to Jesus.

I have times when I hate myself as Paul hated himself. I can't imagine God loving someone as unlovable as me, so I don't try turning to him like Paul suggests. If you feel this way at times, Ephesians 2:14 expresses hope for our problem. "For He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility . . ." (NIV). Although Paul is talking about the Jews and Gentiles, I think we could borrow his idea and apply it to our internal problem. Jesus is our peace. In him my two sides, so irreconcilable, are brought together, and I am completely accepted.

I see this acceptance working in three ways:

1. Because in Christ we are accepted by God, we are no longer debilitated by self-loathing over our rebellious sides and we can love ourselves.

2. We have peace because Jesus ends our internal struggle. On our own we are divided into two warring selves. Centered on him, we experience wholeness and unity.

3. Though we may at times be distracted by the lingering urges of sin, our lives have a single new direction—that of returning God's love through our actions.

## REACT

1. Was it wrong for Eve to want to be like God? Aren't we told that our goal should be to perfectly reproduce his character?

2. Should we in any way look within ourselves for answers?

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Jeff Lopez is a member of the Alhambra, Calif., SDA church. He is a media technology major at Andrews University.



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# "Who Told You You Were Naked?"

by Jerry Wiley

Eve's and Adam's sin was one of denial, the denial of who they were and of the magnificence of that gift. Satan had led the way with "I will be like the Most High." He denied that he was a creature, dependent upon God for his very being. Because of a combination of pride and shame he coveted God's place.

When Eve elected to eat of the tree she declared by her actions that what God had given her was insufficient, and that she would have more. That being "created in the image of God" was not something to cherish and protect, but rather it was something to turn one's back upon. Eve, and soon Adam, declared, "Being a creature 'in the image of God' is second-rate. I will (what a devastating declaration!) be a god, 'knowing good and evil.'"

That temptation, the temptation to know good and evil, is the eternal temptation surrounding every sin, even today's "modern" sins. For example, the temptation to try mind-altering drugs is often placed in terms that sound much like Satan's original "ye shall not surely die" and "ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Today the words may be "come on try it, it won't hurt you, and it will open your mind/head."

No matter what the sin, however, at the root is the denial of one's creaturely dependence. Sinning is a statement that I, not the Father, know best. Although I am dependent upon him for my existence and he gave me the stamp of his image, that is not worth cherishing by obedience. We all say I want to be a god, being human is not good enough for me. In saying that we turn our backs on God, and deny not only his authority, but our own value. Our conduct and our words say, "I'm only valuable if I can know that which God says will kill me." We commit the sin of separation from him.

Interestingly, the record seems to indicate that while God does not approve of sins as actions, he is more concerned with the Sin of separation. Perhaps an analogy will clarify what I suggest. The Sin of separation is the disease that will kill us all, but the sins are symptoms that we have the disease. We humans treat and are most concerned with the symptoms, the sins. But God, the glorious physician, wants to cure the disease, the Sin of separation from the Lifegiver. Thus, since Adam's and Eve's choice in the garden, he has come seeking us to cure the Sin of separation: "Adam, where art thou?" Indeed, he did not focus on the sins, the symptoms, until Adam did. Remember that when Adam told him that he was hiding because he was naked, God responded by asking, "Who told you you were naked?" The implication is that God wasn't accusing Adam by looking at the symptoms of the illness. Only Adam was. God wanted to cure the separation.

Asserted: Sin is separation from God by our denial of the enormous value of our creatureliness, and thus our denial of his place as our Creator.

## OPINION

Key Text:  
Genesis 3:5

"Eve, and soon Adam, declared 'Being a creature 'in the image of God' is second-rate.'"

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Jerry Wiley is a professor of law and associate dean at the University of Southern California Law Center.

# A NEW BEGINNING

“Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth” (Genesis 9:16, NIV).



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# An Invitation for Salvation

by Harold Faunselau

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Genesis 5:32  
9:17.

The Flood is one of the compelling events in human history. Sin had reached new excesses: "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and . . . every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Satan was enjoying success, as practically everybody seemed to be in his service. Clearly, the scene could not go on forever, and God had to intervene dramatically.

Usually when we think about the Flood we are saddened by the terrible loss of life and property, but we should focus instead on the saving mercy of God, who provided a sure way to escape this destruction. Sadly, only eight persons took advantage of this opportunity, and the rest refused salvation.

So it was with Sodom and Gomorrah. And Jesus said that it would be so at the end of the world, too.

The Flood story, therefore, is more than just a great tragedy; it is more a generous invitation to escape destruction. The principal theme here is salvation.

In his great love, God provides solutions to our problems. He is interested in the seeming trivia as well as in the momentous decisions of our daily lives. He yearns for a constant relationship with us, and wants to continue this throughout eternity. And for this purpose he has made provision for our salvation.

In the time of the Flood the invitation for salvation was not restricted, and it was repeated daily for 120 years. When the end neared some amazing things happened . . . like animals filing two by two, and in sevens, into the ark: methodically, improbably, miraculously. The birds flew in formation to take their place inside the ark. And the people watched in amazement. Nothing like this had ever been seen before. What more could God do?

God does not spare anything in his invitation to us, except one thing: He will not force us. That's the way he works! And he provides the only way to eternal life. Amazing grace! Amazing love!

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Harold Faunselau is a physician in Glendale, Calif.



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# The Remembering God

**LOGOS** Theme: In his love, God brought decisive judgment against the corruption that afflicted the earth by sending the Flood, while at the same time offering humanity a new chance through Noah and the ark.

The writer of Genesis used a highly organized literary form known as a chiasmus to relate the epic of the Flood. This structure is encountered elsewhere in the Old Testament as well as in Revelation. It is comprised of a sequence of units in which the action flows through each unit to a climax, and then returns through the same sequence in reverse order. By noting the chiasmic structure of the flood story, given below, we are aided in discerning the point the author is trying to make, and his method in doing so.

Noah's age at the introduction of the Flood story (5:32)

Prologue: Human sin (6:1-10)

Violence on earth, Flood and covenant announced (6:11-22)

Command to enter the ark (7:1-16)

Rising flood waters (7:17-24)

**GOD REMEMBERS NOAH** (8:1)

Receding flood waters (8:2-14)

Command to leave the ark (8:15-19)

Harmony on earth, sacrifice, covenant consummated (8:20-9:19)

Epilogue: Human sin (9:20-27)

Noah's age at death (9:29)

Due to limited space we will divide our discussion to three segments, rather than following the above outline point by point.

## 1. Prologue (read Gen. 5:32-7:16)

*"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain" (6:5, 6, NIV).*

The wickedness prevalent prior to the Flood that prompted God's judgment is not to be underestimated. God was not operating on a different standard than he does today. Their [the antediluvians] wickedness was great, that is, abundance of sin was committed in all places, by all sorts of people; and such sin as was in its own nature most gross, and heinous, and provoking; it was committed daringly, and with a defiance of heaven, nor was any care taken by those that had power in their hands to restrain and punish it."1 It seems that God has a consistent threshold of judgment—at which the rampant spread of sin must be dealt with.

The pressure of ridicule and scorn upon Noah and his tiny minority must have been massive as they constructed the ark and preached coming destruction. Yet they persevered at a task that at

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times must have seemed pointless even to them. In so doing, they provided an example of faithfulness in the face of persecution and doubt that is second to none.

*What parallels can you draw between the faithfulness and response to challenge exhibited by Noah and what God's people will need in facing impending crisis?*

## 2. The Climax (read Gen.7:17-8:12)

*"Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days. But God remembered Noah . . ." (7:23-8:1, NIV).*

Superceding even the remarkable faithfulness of Noah is the faithfulness of God. This divine care is expressed in 8:1. "This verse does not imply that God had forgotten Noah for a time. It is an expression indicating divine solicitude and grace. A touching indication of the tenderness of God toward his creatures is found in the statement that God also remembered, with Noah, all other living things. He who proclaimed that although five sparrows are 'sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God' (Luke 12:6, 7; cf. Matt. 10:29-31; 6:26), will remember his faithful children, who 'are of more value than many sparrows.'"<sup>2</sup>

## 3. The Epilogue (read Gen. 8:13-9:18)

*"Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth'" (9:1, NIV).*

God's active care for Noah and his family not only encompassed their immediate safety but their future as well. His foresight extended even to the choice of where their ark would settle. The area of Ararat was ideally suited for their task of inhabiting the world. "Mount Ararat especially is situated almost in the middle, not only of the great desert route of Africa and Asia, but also of the range of inland waters from Gibraltar to the Baikal Sea . . . and, as the central point of the longest landline of the ancient world, from the Cape of Good Hope to the Bering Strait, it was the most suitable spot in the world, for the tribes and nations that sprang from the sons of Noah to descend from its heights and spread into every land."<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, however, this promising story of a new beginning has a rather sad ending, as evil re-emerged and people returned to their godless ways. Even so, the unfailing faithfulness of God remained—that is the recurring theme of the Flood story.

*What does the Flood story suggest to you about the way God deals with people? How detailed are his plans for each person?*

L. R. C.

1. *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 52.

2. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 259.

3. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 148.

# Confidence That God Won't Forget

selected by Wendy L. Miller

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Genesis 9:8-11

"And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud. . . . And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."

What a condescension on the part of God! What compassion for erring man, to place the beautiful, variegated rainbow in the clouds, a token of the covenant of the great God with man! This rainbow was to evidence the fact to all generations that God destroyed the inhabitants of the earth by a flood, because of their great wickedness. It was His design that as the children of aftergenerations should see the bow in the cloud and should inquire the reason of this glorious arch that spanned the heavens, their parents could explain to them the destruction of the old world by a flood, because the people gave themselves up to all manner of wickedness, and that the hands of the Most High had bent the bow and placed it in the clouds as a token that He would never again bring a flood of waters on the earth.

"This symbol  
in the clouds  
is to confirm  
the belief  
of all."

This symbol in the clouds is to confirm the belief of all, and establish their confidence in God, for it is a token of divine mercy and goodness to man; that although God had been provoked to destroy the earth by the Flood, yet His mercy still encompasseth the earth. God says when He looketh upon the bow in the cloud He will remember. He would not have us understand that He would ever forget, but He speaks to man in his own language, that man may better understand Him.<sup>1</sup>

As we gaze upon the beautiful sight, we may be joyful in God, assured that He Himself is looking upon this token of His covenant, and that as He looks upon it He remembers the children of earth, to whom it was given. Their afflictions, perils, and trials are not hidden from Him. We may rejoice in hope, for the bow of God's covenant is over us. He never will forget the children of His care. How difficult for the mind of finite man to take in the peculiar love and tenderness of God, and His matchless condescension when He said, "I will look upon the bow in the cloud, and remember thee."<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

Do you think the promise of the rainbow covenant that the earth would never again be destroyed by water can be extended to other ways the world might be destroyed—such as nuclear holocaust?

1. *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 70, 71.
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1091.

Wendy L. Miller is the secretary of the Glendale Seventh-day Adventist Church.



# Not Proof, But Informed Faith

by Robbin Simmons

The universality of a flood story in ancient cultures and present day cultures who have ancient legends still operative is nothing short of amazing. There is virtually no culture that doesn't have a legend or two of a worldwide flood and a group of their ancestors that survived it in a boat to repopulate the earth! In fact, the present Chinese symbol for flood is a boat that contains eight people.

The best known ancient flood story (other than Noah's) is contained in the Gilgamesh Epic. It is a story of an ancient Mesopotamian hero named Gilgamesh who has all kinds of miraculous adventures. Some of the most interesting passages are below so that you can compare the epic to the biblical flood story. Keep in mind that this is just one story out of many. There are also similar stories out of the Hittite empire and the Hurrian tribes. Most of this text was found in the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, so maybe Jonah had more to talk about in his evangelistic crusade than his sunburn!

[Gilgamesh] Tear down this house, build a ship! Give up possessions, seek thou life. . . . Aboard the ship take thou the seed of all living things. The ship that thou shalt build, Her dimensions shall be to measure. Equal shall be her width and her length. . . .

"On the fifth day I laid her framework. One (whole) acre was her floor space. Ten dozen cubits each edge of the square deck, ten dozen cubits the height of each of her walls. I laid out the contours and joined her together. I provided her with six decks, dividing her thus into seven parts. Her floor plan I divided into nine parts. I hammered water-plugs into her. I saw to the punting-poles and laid in supplies. Six sar (48,000 gallons) of bitumen I poured into the furnace. Three sar of asphalt I also poured inside. . . .

"Whatever I had of all living being I laded upon her. All my family and kin I made go aboard the ship. The beast of the field, the wild creatures of the field, all the craftsmen I made go aboard. . . . For one day the south-storm blew, submerging mountains, overtaking the people like a battle. . . .

"Six days and nights blows the flood wind, when the seventh day arrived the flood subsided in the battle. The sea grew quiet, the tempest was still, the flood ceased."<sup>1</sup>

Even though this story was written around 2000 B.C. it does not of course prove there was a flood nor does the universality of flood stories prove there was a flood. Such stories can be used however to inform our faith in a loving God.

## REACT

Based on the brief passage given here, what similarities and differences do you see between the Gilgamesh story and the Genesis flood story?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Genesis 6:14-22

**"All my family  
and kin  
I made go  
aboard the  
ship."**

1. Taken from *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, Princeton University Press, 1954.

Robbin Simmons is a screenwriter from Glendale, Calif.

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# Being Ark Builders

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Genesis 8:1,**  
**10, 11**

A well-known aphorism tells us that "the church is like Noah's ark—you couldn't stand the stench on the inside if it weren't for the storm on the outside." Comparisons between the ark and the church come perhaps more by way of analogy than true exegesis of the flood story. Yet I think we find in the story some hints about how we can be successful "ark builders"—creators of Christian communities that offer refuge in a turbulent, destructive world.

1. **Be willing to risk the audacious.** With no empirical reasons on which to base his actions, Noah undertook the audacious task of building a boat roughly the size of the Rose Bowl. Today it is no less audacious to try to build a community where *anyone* can find acceptance and care; where peace is affirmed and violence, even against enemies is renounced; where wealth and power are used for service not domination; where truth is more important than expedience; where no threat of intimidation or fear of being odd mutes witness to the gospel of the kingdom.

2. **Don't allow differences to be barriers.** The ark brought together in close quarters an immense variety of creatures with little in common other than their need to avoid the flood. Our modern ark must be a place where "human beings come together as human beings in such a way that the differences between them stop being barriers."<sup>1</sup> Differences in race, culture, sex, income, politics and even theology are not obliterated in a successful ark, but they are not allowed to be barriers to fellowship and unity.

3. **Ride out the storm in hope.** Despite the assurance of God's past leading, there must have been some anxious moments for the voyagers in Noah's ark. And today the demonic forces in our world seem so out of control and our vessel so frail in comparison, that we can't help but wonder how the future can hold any promise.

Yet God remembered Noah (Gen. 8:1), and sent him a sign of hope in the dove who came back to the ark with an olive leaf in its beak (vv. 10, 11). Though it would still be weeks before Noah and his family could set foot on dry ground, the olive leaf brought a hope for the future for those weary and battered by the storm.

In his leadership in our history, in the love that we experience in Christian community, in the mysterious awe that worship can evoke, and supremely in Jesus Christ himself, God gives us olive leaves of hope. These gifts do not make us glib about the world's chaos or insensitive to its need, but, in the words of Frederick Buechner, they enable us to "ride out the storm with courage and know that the little sprig of green in the dove's mouth betokens a reality beyond the storm more precious than the likes of us can imagine."<sup>2</sup>

D. F. M.

## REACT

Can you think of ways of extending the analogy between the church and Noah's ark? Are there any dangers to this comparison?

1. Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*, pp. 41, 42.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

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# “As in the Days of Noah”

by C. S. Lewis

The doctrine of the Second Coming has failed, so far as we are concerned, if it does not make us realize that at every moment of every year in our lives Donne's question “What if this present were the world's last night?” is equally relevant.

Sometimes this question has been pressed upon our minds with the purpose of exciting fear. I do not think that is its right use. I am, indeed, far from agreeing with those who think all religious fear barbarous and degrading and demand that it should be banished from the spiritual life. Perfect love, we know, casteth out fear. But so do several other things—ignorance, alcohol, passion, presumption, and stupidity. It is very desirable that we should all advance to that perfection of life in which we shall fear no longer; but it is very undesirable, until we have reached that stage, that we should allow any inferior agent to cast out fear. The objection to any attempt at perpetual trepidation about the Second Coming is, in my view, quite a different one: namely, that it will certainly not succeed. Fear is an emotion: and it is quite impossible—even physically impossible—to maintain any emotion for very long. A perpetual excitement of hope about the Second Coming is impossible for the same reason. Crisis-feeling of any sort is essentially transitory. Feelings come and go, and when they come a good use can be made of them: they cannot be our regular spiritual diet.

What is important is not that we should always fear (or hope) about the End but that we should always remember, always take it into account. An analogy may here help. A man of seventy need not be always feeling (much less talking) about his approaching death: but a wise man of seventy should always take it into account. He would be foolish to embark on schemes which presuppose twenty more years of life: he would be criminally foolish not to make—indeed, not to have made long since—his will. Now, what death is to each man, the Second Coming is to the whole human race. We all believe, I suppose, that a man should “sit loose” to his own individual life, should remember how short, precarious, temporary, and provisional a thing it is; should never give all his heart to anything which will end when his life ends. What modern Christians find it harder to remember is that the whole life of humanity in this world is also precarious, temporary, provisional.

## REACT

How prominent should the second coming and judgment be in our thinking as we go about our routine activities? Should we not continually be hoping for the End with eager expectance?

## OPINION

Key text:  
Matthew 24:37

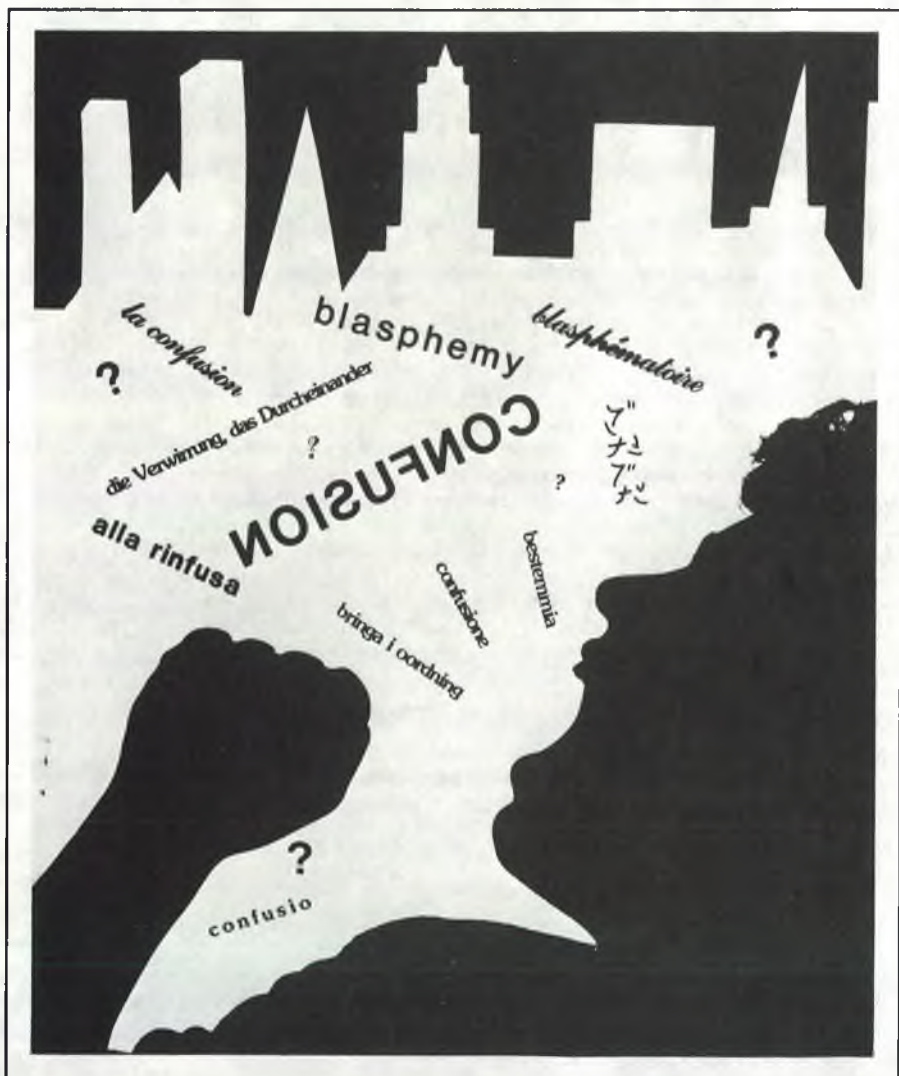
“A perpetual excitement of hope about the Second Coming is impossible.”

Excerpted from C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night*, Copyright 1952 by C. S. Lewis and reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.



# A CITY CALLED CONFUSION

"After this, I saw another angel come down from heaven, with great authority given to him; *the earth was lit up with his glory*. At the top of his voice he shouted, '*Babylon has fallen, Babylon the great has fallen*', . . . 'Come out, my people, away from her, so that you do not share in her crimes and have the same plagues to bear'" (Revelation 18:1, 2, 4, Jerusalem Bible).



# Profile of Babel's Hero

Picture Napoleon Bonaparte, Daniel Boone and Mr. T combined into one person and you will have my concept of Nimrod—an important character in this week's lesson. Nimrod is described as a "mighty warrior", (Mr. T) and a "mighty hunter" (Boone), and is the first emperor (Napoleon) in biblical history (Gen. 10:8-12). According to the ancient Jewish historian Josephus, Nimrod was also the mastermind of the Tower of Babel.

There is much to admire in Nimrod. Most obvious perhaps was the physical powers he displayed as he swashbuckled through the ancient Near East from conquest to conquest. But he must have been a brilliant strategist as well in order to forge an empire that included Babylon, Akkad, and Assyria.

And supervising construction of the city of Babel and its imposing tower required strong administrative skills. Nimrod was right on the cutting edge of new technology by having the builders use bitumen rather than mortar to hold their bricks together (11:3). Even today it is almost impossible to detach bricks from ancient ruins where bitumen was used in construction.<sup>1</sup> And Nimrod no doubt had high religious motivations. Surely a tower reaching to heaven would put him and his people in more direct contact with the divine.

In sum, Nimrod was a role

model for progress, efficiency and superior achievement. Yet we as Adventists consider it a crucial part of our special mission to call people out of every human system based on Nimrod's approach to life. The "second angel's message" declares that the Nimrodian system (Babylon) has fallen (Rev. 14:6) and the "loud cry" urges people to come out of that system (Rev. 18:4).

Why? Somehow, despite initial appearances to the contrary, progress and success achieved apart from God ultimately lead to destruction. People who choose life apart from God still retain enough of the image of their Maker to create things of incredible magnificence. But they lack the moral capacity to prevent their creations from causing more harm than good.

Perhaps that's why God frustrated the progress of Nimrod and his Babel builders. He knew that the time inevitably would come, a time that has now arrived, in which human genius would not only make life more convenient, efficient and painless than ever before, but would also arrogate to itself the unprecedented power to utterly destroy life on the planet. God wanted to delay that time in order to work out his saving plan.

By studying the original Babel this week, perhaps we will be able to discern with more clarity the manifestations of Babylon in our own time.

**INTRODUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**Genesis 9:18-11:26.**

D. F. M.

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 284.

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# From the Flood to Abram

## LOGOS

**Theme:** The years between the Flood and Abraham in the Genesis record show that despite the revelation of God's judgment and mercy, humanity is still prone to pride, unbelief and sin.

### 1. The Sons of Noah and Their Descendants (read Gen. 9:18-10:32)

*"These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, with their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood" (10:32, NIV).*

Though he had been found "blameless" in the Lord's sight, Noah was not immune to the allure of wine. The reaction of his sons to his embarrassing, drunken condition (9:21-23) gave insight into their characters and prompted pronouncements from Noah regarding their descendants.

Despite the many names and tribes mentioned in the "table of nations" (ch. 10), it is difficult to trace with certainty the descendants of Noah's sons through the history of the world. Many of the names given have undergone drastic alteration over the centuries, and some of the names variously represent either groups of people, physical locations, or individuals. There are some readily and reliably identifiable names of significance such as Javan (father of the Greeks), Tarshish (for whom areas in southwestern Spain are named), Mizraim (Egypt), Nimrod (for his association with the Babel affair), and Asshur (father of the Assyrians). Most of the others can be at least tenuously associated with ones mentioned in various ancient manuscripts, but interpretations vary.

*Does Noah's drunkenness indicate that he had fallen out of his relationship with God, at least temporarily?*

*Why were Shem and Japheth so highly commended simply for not looking at their father?*

### 2. The Tower of Babel (read Gen. 11:1-9)

*"Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. . . . Then they said 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves. . . .' But the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth. . ." (11:1, 4, 5, 8, NIV).*

Matthew Henry comments on the aims of the builders of the tower of Babel.

"(1) It seems designed for an affront to God himself; for they would build a tower whose top might reach to heaven, which bespeaks a defiance of God, or at least a rivalry with him. They would be like the Most High, or would come as near him as they could, not in holiness but in height. . . .

"(2) They hoped hereby to make themselves a name; they would do something to be talked of now, and to give posterity to know that there had been such men as they in the world! . . .

"(3) They did it to prevent their dispersion. . . . That they might



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unite in one glorious empire, they resolve to build this city and tower, to be the metropolis of their kingdom and the center of their unity."<sup>1</sup> Is it conceivable that Nimrod may have been behind the project—not content to rule scattered colonies, but desiring to be the sole universal monarch.

The divine response was not uncertain. God could not abide such insubordination and blasphemy, and so devised a clever and unobtrusive way to foil the human schemes. Suddenly one language became many, and effective communication became impossible. Undoubtedly oblivious to the unseen hand of God, each language group successively ceased work in bewilderment and frustration, and proceeded to disperse as God had originally instructed.

*Why did God want the people dispersed? Was he threatened by human capability, as verse six seems to imply?*

### **3. From Shem to Abram (read 11:10-26)**

*"After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran" (Gen. 11:26, NIV).*

Somehow, during the centuries between Shem and Abram, true understanding and worship of God was largely lost sight of. Terah, Abram's father, "worshiped other gods" (see Josh. 24:2). As before the flood, the world was degenerating into spiritual darkness and alienation. It was time for the plan of redemption to be set in motion. In Abram God found the mover, the initiator, that he needed.

L. R. C.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry's Commentary, vol. 1, p. 79.

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# The Builders of Babel

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text:**  
**Genesis 11:5-8**

The Babel builders had indulged the spirit of murmuring against God. Instead of gratefully remembering His mercy to Adam and His gracious covenant with Noah, they had complained of His severity in expelling the first pair from Eden and destroying the world by a flood. But while they murmured against God as arbitrary and severe, they were accepting the rule of the cruelest of tyrants. Satan was seeking to bring contempt upon the sacrificial offerings that prefigured the death of Christ; and as the minds of the people were darkened by idolatry, he led them to counterfeit these offerings and sacrifice their own children upon the altars of their gods. As men turned away from God, the divine attributes—justice, purity, and love—were supplanted by oppression, violence, and brutality.

**'God bears long with the perversity of men, giving them ample opportunity for repentance.'**

The men of Babel had determined to establish a government that should be independent of God. There were some among them however, who feared the Lord, but who had been deceived by the pretensions of the ungodly and drawn into their schemes. For the sake of these faithful ones the Lord delayed His judgments and gave the people time to reveal their true character. As this was developed, the sons of God labored to turn them from their purpose; but the people were fully united in their Heaven-daring undertaking. Had they gone unchecked, they would have demoralized the world in its infancy. Their confederacy was founded in rebellion; a kingdom established for self-exaltation, but in which God was to have no rule or honor. Had this confederacy been permitted, a mighty power would have borne sway to banish righteousness—and with it peace, happiness, and security—from the earth. For the divine statutes, which are "holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12), men were endeavoring to substitute laws to suit the purpose of their own selfish and cruel hearts.

Those that feared the Lord cried unto Him to interpose. "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded." In mercy to the world He defeated the purpose of the tower builders and overthrew the memorial of their daring. In mercy He confounded their speech, thus putting a check on their purposes of rebellion. God bears long with the perversity of men, giving them ample opportunity for repentance; but He marks all their devices to resist the authority of His just and holy law. From time to time the unseen hand that holds the scepter of government is stretched out to restrain iniquity. Unmistakable evidence is given that the Creator of the universe, the One infinite in wisdom and love and truth, is the Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth, and that none can with impunity defy His power.

*Taken from Patriarchs  
and Prophets, pp. 122,  
123.*

# Misdirected Worship

by Jim Wallis

The worship of idols is one of the most consistent themes throughout all of Scripture. While the word *idolatry* conjures up all sorts of images of ancient pagan rituals and cults, the Bible sees idolatry as present and pervasive in every culture and period of history.

The worship of idols takes many forms, some direct and unmistakable, some far more deceptive and subtle. In our own times, we witness people, relationships, institutions, ideologies, movements, and nations caught in the grip of contemporary idolatries. The contemporary idolatries that have captured our worship and servitude are familiar realities; money, possessions, power, race, class, sex, nation, status, success, work, violence, religion, ideology, causes, and so on. The militant power of the contemporary idolatries has captured the corporations and institutions of commerce, the state and the branches of government, the private and public bureaucracies, the various professions, the schools and universities, media and entertainment, and the churches. The presence of these idols or gods is felt in our economic and political systems, our social and cultural patterns, crucially affecting the way we relate to one another. Idols perpetuate themselves by erecting self-justifying ideologies and informational systems with the ability to turn falsehood into seeming truth by the distortion of language itself.

Biblically understood, idolatry originates in the human decision to seek life and salvation apart from the source of life in God. Idols are "imposters of God," as William Stringfellow has described them. They may be things, ideas, persons, or institutions exalted and worshiped as gods. Rather than these finite realities serving people, people come to serve and worship them as objects of ultimate concern that are allowed to substitute for God. Idolatry denies the place of God as the giver of life and the author of salvation, dehumanizes people by making them pay homage to objects not deserving of worship, and denigrates the proper vocation of things meant to be servants of human life, not rulers over it.

Idolatry is a decision to seek life and salvation by the worship and trust of something other than God. It is to identify with some part of one's environment, a part of reality that is within reach and seems to have the power to bring the satisfaction and fulfillment that is missing in one's life. Having given up the possibilities of trusting God, trust is placed in something that can, it is believed, be manipulated and possessed—an idol. This style of life is what the Bible calls living in darkness and sin, and it becomes a mode of salvation centered on self-appreciation and consumption and the illusion of being able to manipulate and control one's idols rather than vice versa.

One may choose material security and comfort, power and domination over others, human recognition, gratification of the senses, particular kinds of experiences, and so on. But whatever the choice, it is never enough to satisfy, to fill the void. Because most

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text:**  
**Revelation**  
**18:1-4**

**"Idolatry, and its consequent alienation, is ultimately the worship of death itself."**

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others have also adopted this mode of self-salvation, they are viewed as competitors. The objects sought in this process take on personal and ultimate value, while the persons involved become mere objects in the struggle. All this results in alienation—alienation from God, from others, from oneself.

Idolatry, and its consequent alienation, is ultimately the worship of death itself, as William Stringfellow has noted in his book *Imposters of God*. He goes on to comment that *death* is used biblically to mean not only physical death but all forms of diminution of human life and dignity, and that since idolatry of any kind demeans humanity, preventing people from being fully human, death is what idolaters really worship.

**“When the source of one’s salvation is beyond oneself, one is free to serve rather than to appropriate.”**

The cycle and its destructive consequences are no less true for institutions than for individuals. Institutions, rather than developing as corporate bodies in service of human life and well-being, become distorted by the purposes of appropriation and manipulation. Distorted institutions project responsibility for their failures onto others, and any who won’t accept the plan of salvation offered by the institution or who stand in the way of it are designated “enemy.”

Identification with an institution comes when its purposes are seen to be continuous or contributive to one’s own. Identification is made, not only with a particular institution, but with the political, economic, and sociocultural system on which the institution is dependent and of which it forms a part. The fulfillment of oneself is seen to be dependent upon the maintenance and perpetuation of those institutions. This, of course, is idolatry.

Breaking the cycle of idolatry requires salvation through relationship with the source of life itself, which can bring freedom from the identification with idols and from viewing others as competitors and threats to one’s own salvation. When the source of one’s salvation is beyond oneself, one is free to serve rather than to appropriate. The life and death of Christ demonstrate that salvation and reconciliation come through conquering alienation by love and a cross. Through self-giving servanthood, the Christian community demonstrates the victory of Christ over human alienation and begins to break the hold of the prevailing idolatries over people’s lives.

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# Speaking With One Language

by Ted Wick

I have always thought that the story of the tower of Babel was a *bad* story about *bad* people doing *bad* things. The tower of Babel seems to be a very dark shadow in the history of man. After all, it is a story of the collapse of man's faith in the face of very specific evidence of God's care—the rainbow. Mankind sets about to floodproof his little world by building an architectural masterpiece.

A favorite song of mine contains these words; "Sometimes a shadow dark and cold lays like a mist across life's road. But be encouraged by the sight for where there's shadow there's a light." In the heart of the dark account of Babel, there are some words of light that have explosive power. Scripture says: "And the Lord said, 'behold they are one people and *they all have one language* and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and *nothing* that they propose to do will now be impossible for them'" (Gen. 11:6, RSV, emphasis supplied). Notice that because they spoke "one language" nothing was impossible. A flood of rebellion was building rapidly and their "oneness" was working great mischief. So God interrupted their communication process to slow the tide of evil. However, in the midst of this shadow of misunderstanding there is a shaft of light that applies to your life today. When we communicate clearly with even one other person (speaking one language) there are no limits to the possibilities.

Look at the amazing technology that has been created by people of "one language" working together, understanding each other and sharing what they have learned. Astronauts orbit the earth, walk on the moon, speak to us from outer space and the whole world watches and listens. Businessmen sit at their computer terminals watching four or five markets at one time, buying and selling commodities around the world in seconds at the push of a button. Patients can be diagnosed, monitored and cared for by our advanced medical technology. Just our English-speaking culture has produced an amazing array of technology and we sit back as the research findings come in from around the world and say to ourselves, "What next?" It seems that "nothing that they propose to do is impossible to them."

Very few of us have the opportunity to walk on the moon, invent brain scan technology or design computer hardware, but there is an area for each of us where speaking with "one language" opens up possibilities for growth. This is our relationship with other people. Our Scripture text tells us that in our friendships, in our families, in our marriages, with our work associates, nothing will be impossible for us. There is no communication gap so wide that it cannot be bridged if we speak the same language.

Have you ever found yourself longing to be understood—by even one other human being? Do you feel like you are sitting on the edge of the Tower of Babel with not another living soul within reach speaking your language? Communication is difficult for most peo-

**How To  
Key Text:  
Genesis 11:6**

**"No  
communication  
gap is so  
wide that  
it cannot  
be bridged."**

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ple and impossible for some. Words are not enough. In order to speak "one language" we must know ourselves intimately so that the words and the facial expression and the tone of voice and the body language are all in harmony. This is speaking "one language."

As a young man raised in a conservative Adventist home, I was taught high ideals. I longed to be what I idealized. Soon, I was verbalizing these ideals as though they were a true reflection of myself. But while I spoke the right words, I did not always speak the truth about myself. It has taken many years of living with an understanding (and at times irreverent) wife who challenges my hollow words for me to realize my struggle between the real me and the idealized me. I discovered that I had created my own fantasy and was trying to live in it. My wife tells me that she likes the real me much better than the idealized phantom. I am not sure that I do. It is much easier at times to live with fantasy than with reality, but if I want my communication to be effective, if I want to speak with "one language" only, then I must take the risk of being genuine. In this way, each day (as I struggle for authentic communication) God is blowing the top off my tower of Babel.

### **REACT**

1. What are some typical ways in which we tend to speak in more than "one language" in our relationships? How can we make it easier for ourselves and others to be genuine?

2. Can speaking in "one language" today be a negative thing, as it was at Babel? How?



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# Lessons From the Genealogies

by Joel Wilson

It seems as though we've heard it all before. Confusion, despair, war... particularly confusion. The fact is, humanity always seems to be in a state of disarray and confusion. When we look at Genesis, we can see the origins of confusion and war. In fact, the genealogies often end in some form of human tragedy. The generation after Lamech saw the flood, and the generation after the flood saw Nimrod, the ruler of the plains of Shinar, and the building of the Tower of Babel on those same plains.

In these stories we see alienation between humanity and God because of self-sufficiency (the Flood). We see social and political disintegration because of unity based solely on cultural and linguistic commonality (the Tower of Babel), instead of unity based on, and in, community with God, the Creator of the human community. All of this turns out to be a sad story.

Or does it? Don't the genealogies say more than this? The story that speaks about the Flood also speaks about Noah, the one who built the ark, and saved some of the human race. The genealogy that follows the Tower of Babel ends with Abraham, the friend of God.

So even though humanity finds itself continually in confusion, disunity, and disintegration, God still enters into our history to provide solutions to our predicaments.

Perhaps this is the lesson to be learned from the genealogies. That in the midst of our problem of alienation, God is with us. The last genealogy of the human family will end with, "Behold I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). Christ stands at the beginning of humanity, and will greet it at that great consummation, the Second Coming.

## REACT

*Do "towers of Babel" exist in our modern society? In what ways might we be tempted to construct them?*

## OPINION

Key text:  
Revelation 22:5

"God still enters into our history to provide solutions."

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Joel Wilson is a student at Cal Poly Technical Institute.

# THE CHOSEN FAMILY: AN EPIC BEGINS

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8, NIV).



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# Willing? Where To, Lord?

by Bruce Hagen

The clan had gathered at the palatial estate of the Paul Hollingsworths. The day had been spent in riding Paul's string of thoroughbreds, swimming in the huge pool, admiring Paul's collection of original art, which included an inordinate number of exquisite sculptures, and exclaiming over Deanna's artifacts gathered in the course of a half-dozen world cruises. There had also been time for strolling through the formal gardens and the usual small talk and banalities.

There were whispered surmisings that Paul had a very special reason for this family gathering. After dinner Paul stood up and signalled for the music to stop. He spoke in general but very loving terms as he recalled good times and business successes. Then a long pause, and Paul dropped his "bomb"—he told them all he was leaving them!

Where was he going? He said he didn't know.

Why was he leaving? He said God had told him to leave his home and family and go to a faraway land that God would show him.

"But you can't leave everything you've worked hard to acquire. This is your home, your family, your community!"

"God has his reasons for

asking me to leave. I can do no less for God."

"We don't understand! We simply don't understand!"

"Many things *I* don't understand, but, this I know, God will show the way and help me to understand."

Was it something like that for Abram when God called him to leave Ur? Just what was involved in the call to Abram? It demanded from him a threefold renunciation, increasing in intensity from one to the next. First, "Leave your country," the fatherland, the land of Mesopotamia which embraced both Ur and Haran. Then, "Leave your kindred," the Chaldaic descendants of Shem. And finally, "Leave your father's house," Terah and his family. God made three requests of Abram; as he obeyed these requests, three blessings would be given to him: a new land, a great nation, and untold spiritual blessings.

As we consider this week the life of God's greatest patriarch, his willingness to move as directed, to go wherever God wanted him to go, the story is meaningless to us unless we see ourselves in Abram's place. God speaks as strongly today, perhaps in a different way, but just as distinctly. Do we hear? And hearing, do we act?

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Genesis 11:27-  
15:21

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Bruce Hagen is a graduate student in music at California State University, Long Beach, and Youth Pastor of Long Beach Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Sunday, August 11 67



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# The Response of Faith

**LOGOS** Theme: God calls Abram to father a nation chosen to be a blessing to all people, and Abram responds in faith.

## 1. Heeding the Call (read Gen. 11:27-12:9)

*"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to a land I will show you. . . .'"* (12:1, NIV).

God's call to Abram marks the beginning of the Jewish era just as distinctly as Christ's death marks the commencement of the Christian era. Here God initiates his plan to regain the allegiance of all nations through the influence and example of a select group. "The blessing of Abram was once more to unite the divided families, and change the curse, pronounced upon the ground on account of sin, into a blessing for the whole human race. This concluding word comprehends all nations and times, and condenses . . . the whole fullness of the divine counsel for the salvation of men into the call of Abram. All further promises, therefore, not only to the patriarchs, but also to Israel, were merely expansions and closer definitions of the salvation held out to the whole human race in the first promise."<sup>1</sup>

Abram's willingness to sever himself and his family completely from the past and plunge into the unknown is highly indicative of the character he possessed. His unquestioning obedience to a strange command reveals a trust relationship with God highly developed by years of exercise. Perhaps the Lord waited nine generations after the flood to make the covenant call simply because Abram was the first to demonstrate the qualities God required.

*What would your response be if you were confronted with a command similar to Abram's?*

## 2. Early Missteps (read Gen. 12:10-20)

*"[Abram] said to his wife Sarai, . . . Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you" (12:11, 13, NIV).*

Though Abram had remarkable faith, there were several occasions in which, under pressure, he failed to trust God. The first of these failures recorded was during a famine-induced detour to Egypt. Prior to their arrival, Abram displayed good foresight in the realization that due to Sarah's obvious beauty, he, as her husband, would likely not be very popular in the court of Egypt. So he thought things would go better with him as Sarah's brother, rather than her husband. There was an element of truth in such a statement. Sarah was his half-sister—they had a common father, but different mothers. The plan worked well initially—until Pharaoh was harshly awakened to the full truth of the matter. Abram's error rested not in the truthfulness of his representation, but his motive in perpetrating it. Instead of relying on God to work out the touchy situation, Abram sought another alternative.

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*Why did God inflict serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household (v. 17) when it was Abram who misled Pharaoh?*

### 3. Dealing with Lot (read Gen. 13 and 14)

*"When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. . . . He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people" (14:14, 16, NIV).*

Further evidence of Abram's character development is displayed by his selflessness in dealing with his nephew, Lot. When their just prosperity provoked quarrels between their herdsmen (ch. 13), it was Abram who suggested an equitable solution, as well as granting Lot his preference of the choice land.

When Lot and his family were captured by the "four kings" along with the spoils of several cities, it was Abram who promptly came to his rescue. Exercising faith in the power of God, he took his inferior force of servants and militia in pursuit. A nighttime attack achieved total surprise and success. Thanks to his uncle's resolve and prompt actions, Lot and his family were spared an ignominious life of slavery. It was not to be the last time Abram saved Lot from disaster.

### 4. The Covenant Confirmed (read Gen. 15:1-21)

*"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6, NIV).* Abram's experience provides the Old Testament prototype on which Paul would rely in developing the truth of justification by faith. "For the first time these important concepts, faith and justification, are brought together. It is obvious that Abram had no 'righteousness' until it was credited to him by God. And if he had none, no man has ever had. Abram was a sinner and needed redemption, as does every other human being. . . . Here for the first time, the full importance of faith is brought to view."<sup>2</sup> Here Abram completes his emergence as the man of faith—not to be without occasional lapses and still pending the ultimate test—but functioning on the same wavelength with God.

Though he believed God's promises of the unseen, Abram still desired tangible evidence that they would be fulfilled (v. 8). God provided this confirmation of his promises by engaging with Abram in the ancient ritual of covenant (vv. 9-12). In this ritual, "the parties to a contract walked between the halves of a dead animal and called down on themselves the fate of the victim if they should violate the agreement."<sup>3</sup> What a powerful assurance of God's commitment to the covenant this must have been for Abram.

*Discuss the nature of Abram's faith in the context of Genesis 15. What are the implications for saving faith today?*

L. R. C.

1. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 193, 194.  
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 312.  
3. *Jerusalem Bible* note on Genesis 15.

# A Light to All People

by Ronald Jessen

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Genesis 15:1

Ellen White speaks highly of the character of this man, Abraham. "His character was marked for integrity, generosity and hospitality. He commanded respect as a mighty prince among the people. His reverence and love for God, and his strict obedience in performing His will, gained for him the respect of his servants and neighbors. His godly example, and righteous course, united with his faithful instructions to his servants, and all his household, led them to fear, love and reverence the God of Abraham."<sup>1</sup>

Here was a man who was not ashamed to be a servant of God. "Although his own father was vacillating between the true and the false worship, and with his knowledge of the truth, false theories and idolatrous practices were mingled, Abraham kept free from this infatuation. He was not ashamed of his faith and made no effort to hide the fact that he made God his trust."<sup>2</sup>

Abraham was tested and tried—severely. God wanted a proven agent. "It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. . . .

"Many are still tested as was Abraham. They do not hear the voice of God speaking directly from the heavens, but He calls them by the teachings of His word and the events of His providence. They may be required to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor, to leave congenial and profitable associations, and separate from kindred, to enter upon what appears to be only a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice. God has a work for them to do; but a life of ease and the influence of friends and kindred would hinder this development of the very traits essential for its accomplishment."<sup>3</sup>

Abraham was witness and a light to all the peoples among whom he lived and with whom he came in contact. "God called Abraham, and prospered and honored him; and the patriarch's fidelity was a light to the people in all the countries of his sojourn. Abraham did not shut himself away from the people around him. He maintained friendly relations with the kings of the surrounding nations, by some of whom he was treated with great respect; and his integrity and unselfishness, his valor and benevolence, were representing the character of God. In Mesopotamia, in Canaan, in Egypt, and even to the inhabitants of Sodom, the God of heaven was revealed through His representative."<sup>4</sup>

Despite failings God used and blessed Abraham simply because he was totally committed to God and God's purposes. He expressed that commitment through prayer. "The life of Abraham, the friend of God, was a life of prayer. Wherever he pitched his tent, close beside it was built an altar, upon which were offered the morning and evening sacrifices. . . . And the roving Canaanite, as he came to the altar, knew who had been there. . . . So the homes of Christians should be lights in the world. From them, morning and evening, prayer should ascend to God as sweet incense. And as the morning dew, His mercies and blessings will descend upon the suppliants."<sup>5</sup>

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Ronald Jessen is senior pastor of Long Beach, Calif. SDA Church.

"Many are still tested as was Abraham."

1. *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3-4, p. 99.
2. *Youth's Instructor*, March 4, 1897.
3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 126, 127.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 368.
5. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 44.



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# Abraham Takes Off His Mask

by Grace Coleman

God called Abraham to father a nation. Why Abraham? Because of his sterling character? Hardly. Immediately after God tells him, "I will make you into a great nation" (see Gen. 12:2), Abraham lies to save himself by saying his beloved wife, Sarah, is his sister and stands by while she marries the Pharaoh.

But in this sparse historical account of Abraham's life, we see a dramatic change in him. In Chapter 13 when he and Lot separate and divide the land, his earlier self-serving attitude has altered. He does not opt for the more lush territory but allows Lot first choice. Something happened to change his outlook. I believe Abraham learned through the fear and pain of his deception in Egypt that he possessed what Carl Jung, almost 3,000 years later, called the *persona* and the *shadow*.

For Jung, our basic drive is the search for wholeness, completion, and rebirth. To attain this wholeness, we must become conscious and accepting of two major elements within ourselves, the *persona* and the *shadow*.

The *persona* is the mask we wear to hide the person within. The mask conceals our real thoughts, feelings, and desires. We wear it so habitually to hide from others and ourselves that we are unaware we are wearing it. It has some usefulness; to some extent we need it to function in the world. But if we think that our mask is who we really are, we deceive ourselves and are flat, two-dimensional reflections of society like the Pharisees instead of autonomous, God-inspired human beings.

The *shadow* consists of everything about ourselves that we try to hide. It includes the drive to do those deeds which would contradict our masks. When unacknowledged, the destructive aspects of the *shadow* can actually control us and make us wretched.

To be "whole, complete, and reborn," we must acknowledge and accept that our *persona* is a mask and that our *shadow* is a real, undeniable part of ourselves. When we bring our *shadow* into consciousness and admit, "Yes, this is the way I am," God can reconcile the two parts of ourselves as symbolized by the prodigal son and his brother. The father unites them just as our *persona* and *shadow* must be united. So long as the *shadow* lurks in the dark, it will control us, and we will be defeated. The result of self-honesty, repentance, and acceptance of the *shadow* is genuine humility. We begin to know that our salvation is only from and in God.

So how does all this apply to Abraham? I think when Abraham learned through his lies and compromises that he had a shadow-side, he brought it into the Light and worked out his salvation with fear and trembling. And God worked in him to will and do his good pleasure. He realized that God loved and chose him, *shadow* and all—that he didn't have to wear a mask before God. That truth gave him faith to let Lot choose the better portion of land, to believe God could give he and Sarah a son, to choose God rather than his beloved Isaac in a sacrificial test. He stopped depending on his

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Colossians 2:10

"The result of self-honesty, repentance, and acceptance of the shadow is genuine humility."

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Wednesday, August 14 71

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*persona* or mask for his identity and power, believing totally in the God who made him whole. Now he could truly be a channel for God's truth and power.

And that is why God called him to father a nation.

**REACT**

1. How can we go about coming to terms with our shadows? How might doing so affect one's behavior?

2. Abraham was called the "friend of God" (2 Chron. 20:7). What does his story suggest about how we can be friends of God?

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# Know, Trust, Act

by Suzanne Jessen

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**John 10:4, 5**

Through all the changes in his life Abraham maintained a strong relationship—call it friendship—with God. Any strong relationship is based on knowledge, on trust, and on action, and that was the basis of this friendship.

1. **Knowledge.** Naturally God knew all about Abraham, and he knows all about each of us. Abraham knew God too. He knew God well enough to recognize his call and to follow it. Every Christian must make decisions daily. Decisions that have long term, even eternal, consequences. Like Abraham, the Christian needs to know to whose voice he is listening; his own desires, Satan's promptings, or the directions of God. The only sure way to know is to spend time with God, communicating through prayer and Bible study.

2. **Trust.** Abraham moved out in faith—he didn't know where he was going nor how he was going to get there. He didn't have anything to go on except, and this is a major exception, the word of God promising that God would show him a land, and would there make of him a great nation. When the Christian senses God's call or leading in his life, he too must have the confidence to move without knowing all the answers. As he exercises his faith in God and God's leading, his faith will grow stronger because God will never let him down nor leave him alone and helpless.

3. **Action.** Abraham did not sit down and wait for each step to be mapped out for him. He gathered his family and his possessions and went. When Lot was taken prisoner later on, Abraham did not sit down to weep or to wring his hands in despair. He was prepared for action and with his men at arms Abraham went out and rescued his nephew. God expects Christians to take responsible actions, to make carefully-thought-out decisions and to follow through with them. Even when the decision made is not the best one—as when, in Egypt, Abraham identified Sarah as his sister instead of as his wife—God will continue to work in each situation to bring out of it glory unto himself and the greatest possible good for those who are committed to him. We should not, must not, be afraid to act.

God made specific promises to Abraham of descendants who would be in number as the stars, and of a land that would belong to those descendants. And the record is that "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3, NIV). God's promises, which today are made to us, are as sure today as they were three millenia ago. They are scattered throughout Scripture. Seek them out for yourself. Even more important is that you get to know the One who made the promises. Then, in knowing him you will trust him for he never fails, and trusting him you will have the courage to move out in faith!

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Thursday, August 15 73



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# God's Friends

by Michael Norris

## OPINION

**Key text:**  
**James 2:23**

No other scriptural character is as highly acclaimed as Abraham. Throughout the Bible he is honored as a great example of faith, second only to Jesus. His faith was "credited to him as righteousness," and he received a heavenly "Medal of Honor" in being singled out as the friend of God. Abraham is acclaimed in the spiritual ancestry of three great world religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. As an example of obedience he is unequalled.

Yet the biblical account of the details of Abraham's conspicuous shortcomings is rivaled only by that of David's. Indeed if Abraham were alive today, his deviations would certainly prevent him from receiving a call to the ministry; some would even recommend that he be disfellowshipped.

This great dichotomy in the account of Abraham immediately arouses questions in our minds. How can such an imperfect individual be acclaimed so highly by God himself? Why does our "God-fearing Christian" judgment of individuals differ so greatly from the judgment of God himself? What kind of an individual is God who, though we "blow it" as badly as Abraham did, would salvage us for eternity as his friends? Is Abraham so different from each one of us?

**"If Abraham were alive today, some would even recommend that he be disfellowshipped."**

The story of the call of Abraham parallels the story of God calling each of his children out of darkness. God gave Abraham a measure of faith which he has given to all of us (Rom. 12:3). Abraham chose to act on that faith and obey God's command. Though readily obedient, Abraham had much to learn. Because of his self-reliance, he had to learn to "wait on the Lord" the hard way. Absolute surrender is a big crisis for all who fail in the little crises. Life in general teaches us the same lesson. Imagine the terror of a parachutist told to jump at 10,000 feet when he has never made a practice jump. Calculus would be impossible for a student who has not learned his multiplication tables. Through the circumstances of his daily life, Abraham had to learn that God's way was better than his own way, and that waiting on God was superior to giving him a hand.

The story of Abraham also gives some evidence regarding the way in which God intervenes in our lives. I don't believe that our lives are series of manipulations by God—the Lord lovingly chastening us into submission. Realizing we live on the battleground of the great controversy between God and Satan, we understand that God must allow Satan to apply his plan of destruction which affects all mankind. God gives us freedom of choice and then limits himself (by not intervening) in permitting Satan to afflict us. This is an effort to dismiss all claims of unfairness on his part.

He then, at our request, works with us (Rom. 8:28) through those crisis situations we call trials and tribulations. God lovingly instructs us and compassionately guides us into a deeper relationship with himself, making us less self-reliant. Thus we see the disciplinary action in the final effect of the experience. God did not orches-

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trate it. He merely overrules its thrust in such a way as to refine and purify our experience.

In the life of Abraham and in our own lives, we see God permitting us to live with the consequences of our choices. The suffering we experience through self-reliance then leads us to depend more upon him. God permits us to progress or digress at our own speed, but he never forsakes us, not willing that any of us should be lost (2 Peter 3:9).

Abraham's mistakes were not indicative of his true character. The character of a man is not determined by the occasional good deed or the occasional evil deed, but by the direction of his life. As we digest the events of the life of Abraham, we are vividly reminded that indeed the only prerequisite for salvation is genuine faith. As defined by A. Graham Maxwell, "Faith means having enough confidence in God, based upon the overwhelming evidence revealed, to be willing to believe whatever He says, to accept whatever He offers, and to do whatever He wishes without reservation—for the rest of eternity."<sup>1</sup>

Abraham developed this kind of a relationship with God and it is our opportunity to do the same. Thus we cannot judge Abraham, our fellow man, or even ourselves by the conspicuous sin we all possess. Instead we must strive daily to rely more on God and less upon ourselves through faith. Like Abraham, our faith will be credited to us as righteousness and we, too, will be called God's friends.

**"Absolute  
surrender  
is a big  
crisis for all  
who fail  
in the little  
crises."**

## REACT

1. Why was Abraham seemingly blessed by God, even in his mistakes? Does God show favoritism to his "chosen ones?"
2. Since we cannot judge an individual's motives nor his relationship with God, are we justified in our process of church discipline, whether it be barring individuals from ministry, church office, or membership altogether?

<sup>1</sup>. Lecture by A. Graham Maxwell.

# ABRAHAM: AN EPIC OF FAITH

“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of ages” (Revelation 15:3, NIV).





# A Lesson for "Snakehips"

by Van Perkins

If you had known my old college buddy, "Snakehips," how would you have made the incidents in the life of the patriarch Abraham meaningful to him? "Snakehips" (self-named because of his creative ability to avoid tacklers while running with a football) would certainly have stumbled over the Pauline theology of "the father of those who believe" (see Romans 4:11). Neither am I sure he would have fully comprehended all the covenant implications in this story of the man who is called "the friend of God" three times in Scripture (see 2 Chron. 20:7, James 2:23 and Isa. 41:8).

"Snakehips" could throw a football practically the length of the field. He could run the 100-yard dash in less than 10 seconds. He was a professional nightclub singer while still in college and a feared pugilist as well. "Snakehips" physical talents were many but he, like all of us mortals, had at least one outstanding fault. His was intemperance, sexual intemperance. So I think "Snakehips" might have done well to study the lesson for this week, Genesis 16-19, which contains more implicit and illicit sex than any other four connected chapters of the Bible.

It would not have seemed risqué to "Snakehips," in fact it might have even made the study relevant to him, to discuss the following questions

raised by these chapters:

1. Gen. 16 - Hagar and Ishmael. What, if any, are the positive or negative results of polygamy? Does one set of results outweigh the other and why?

2. Gen. 17 - The Covenant re-affirmed and sealed. Why circumcision? Why not pierced ears?

3. Gen. 18:16-33 - Abraham intercedes for Sodom. Of whom was Abraham thinking? Was he only thinking of his family? Might he have been thinking of friends who were homosexual?

4. Gen. 19:30-38 - The fate of Lot and his daughters. Is incest a viable alternative to extinction? Why or why not? Should abortion have been considered for the unborn children produced by the incest, the future progenitors of the Moabites and Ammonites? Why or why not? Should we care about them? Why or why not? (see vv. 37, 38).

Very possibly my old college chum would have learned from this lesson some basics about a behavioral area in which men and women more renowned than he have fallen. Moreover, these basics would carry over into the broader theme of faith in the Friend of friends. "Snakehips" would have learned about responsiveness to divine direction, despite inconsistent faith. He would have learned of a God whose promised faithfulness never fails.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Genesis 16-19

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Sunday, August 18 77

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# The Star of the Covenant Drama

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Though Abram's faith is inconsistent and he suffers the consequences of unwise choices, he remains responsive to direction from God, whose covenant faithfulness is unailing.

### 1. The Hagar Affair (read Gen. 16:1-16)

*"So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife" (16:3, NIV).*

Even the great faith of Abram was not immune to the eroding effects of time and unrealized expectations. It was Sarai's doubt about the fulfillment of the promise of an heir (15:4) through conventional means that initially brought about the search for alternative methods by which the promise could be fulfilled. But her doubting soon affected Abram also and he became receptive to her suggestions. "The resolution seemed a judicious one, and according to the customs of the East, there would be nothing wrong in carrying it out. Hence Abram consented without opposition, because, as Malachi (2:15) says, he sought the seed promised by God. But they were both of them soon to learn, that their thoughts were the thoughts of man and not of God, and that their wishes and actions were not in accordance with the divine promise."<sup>1</sup> This is a common error of humans, attaching the signature of God to their favorite solution to any problem. People often do not exercise enough patience to allow God a free hand.

Inevitably, Sarai's pet solution simply turned out to be a bigger problem. For when Hagar recognized the newly-elevated status she had as expectant mother of the long-awaited heir, she lost no time in asserting her superiority over her ex-mistress. This, of course, was more than Sarai could take. And when Abram was forced to intervene in Sarai's behalf, Hagar fled rather than submit to Sarai in her original role, taking the future with her.

But then the faithful covenant God comes to the rescue, physically turning a hopeless situation into a blessing. Read the rest of the story in chapter 16. Once again the star of the drama is not Abram, man of faith, but Yahweh, God of Faithfulness. Human faith again is inadequate, but God makes up the difference.

*Why is "waiting for God" so difficult to do? What role does patience play in our salvation?*

### 2. Renewing the Covenant—Again (read 17:1-27)

*"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. . . . I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you . . ." (Gen. 17:4, 5, 7, NIV).*

In this reaffirmation of the covenant, God brought in some new features to make Abram's faith stronger. First, he changes his

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name from Abram, meaning "exalted father," to Abraham, "father of a multitude." This served to encourage Abraham and confirm his faith, even as princes dignify their favorites by conferring new titles upon them. Thus Abraham was displayed to the world as a close, personal friend of God.

An important truth about the nature of God is evident in verse 5. God states in the past tense, in the sense of it already being done, that Abraham has been made the father of many nations. Thus we are reminded that God is not bound by time and that his intentions are, in effect, his actions. To quote Paul, God "calls things that are not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17, NIV)—for his decisions are not subject to any factors beyond his will.

God also gave Abraham a physical sign to confirm the existence and validity of the covenant. He instructed Abraham to circumcise all of the males in his household. Besides being a sign of the covenant, circumcision served some additional purposes. It was destined: (1) to distinguish the seed of Abraham from the Gentiles (Eph. 2:11), (2) to foster the cultivation of moral purity (Deut. 10:16), (3) to represent righteousness by faith (Rom. 2:29), and (4) to foreshadow the Christian rite of baptism (Col. 2:11, 12).<sup>2</sup>

*Has God given us today concrete, physical signs of our covenant relationship with him? If so, why are they significant?*

### 3. Abraham the Intercessor (read 18:1-19:38)

*"Then Abraham approached him and said: Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? . . . Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:24, 25, NIV).*

Abraham feels an acute sympathy for the residents of the plain, who are unconscious that they are about to become the victims of their sin. So he fervently intercedes for them before the Lord. "He was led to intercede in this way . . . by the love which springs from consciousness that one's own preservation and rescue are due to compassionate grace alone; love, too, which cannot conceive of the guilt of others as too great for salvation to be possible. This sympathetic love, springing from the faith which was counted for righteousness, impelled him to the intercession. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

*Do we as a church and as individuals exhibit this sort of limitless caring for even the worst of sinners? How can we do so in practical, effective ways?*

L. R. C.

1. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 219.  
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 322, 323.  
3. Keil and Delitzsch, p. 231.



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# A Sinner's Plea

**TESTIMONY**  
Key text:  
Genesis 18:17

God conferred great honor upon Abraham. Angels of heaven walked and talked with him as friend with friend. When judgments were about to be visited upon Sodom, the fact was not hidden from him, and he became an intercessor with God for sinners. His interview with the angels presents also a beautiful example of hospitality.

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." Psalm 25:14. Abraham had honored God, and the Lord honored him, taking him into His counsels, and revealing to him His purposes. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" said the Lord. "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." God knew well the measure of Sodom's guilt; but He expressed Himself after the manner of men, that the justice of His dealings might be understood. Before bringing judgment upon the transgressors He would go Himself, to institute an examination of their course; if they had not passed the limits of divine mercy, He would still grant them space for repentance.

Two of the heavenly messengers departed, leaving Abraham alone with Him whom he now knew to be the Son of God. And the man of faith pleaded for the inhabitants of Sodom. Once he had saved them by his sword, now he endeavored to save them by prayer. Lot and his household were still dwellers there; and the selfish love that prompted Abraham to their rescue from the Elamites, now sought to save them, if it were God's will, from the storm of divine judgment.

"Himself a sinner, he pleaded in the sinner's behalf."

With deep reverence and humility he urged his plea: "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." There was no self-confidence, no boasting of his own righteousness. He did not claim favor on the ground of his obedience, or of the sacrifices he had made in doing God's will. Himself a sinner, he pleaded in the sinner's behalf. Such a spirit all who approach God should possess. Yet Abraham manifested the confidence of a child pleading with a loved father. He came close to the heavenly Messenger, and fervently urged his petition.

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.

## REACT

Abraham's experience, and numerous New Testament passages such as Acts 12:5; 2 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 1:19; and 1 Tim. 2:1, 2 suggest that intercessory prayer is an important part of the Christian Life. Why is this so, in view of the fact that God knows the needs of everyone? Can you suggest creative ways in which to practice this form of prayer?

Excerpted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 138-140.

# Judgment at the Crossroads

by Keith Plummer

I have been mulling over one question at length. Why was Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt? If we say that her behavior pattern was beyond change, then we run into a challenge from social learning theory.

"Social-learning theory, based on Skinner's operant conditioning principles and the classical conditioning paradigms, describes behavior change as a function of stimuli provided by the social environment."<sup>1</sup> If we accept the key assumption of social learning theory that all behavior is learned and can be changed (Bandura, 1969), then the question arises, Why did God kill Lot's wife on the spot?

She had grown to like the city with its atmosphere, excitement, and sexual titillation. Even before she left the city with Lot, she hesitated and had to be led outside the walls by the angels (Gen. 19:16). On the way to safety she did not simply trip and happen to glance back at Sodom. She turned around because of her longing for what was there. Since she was with her family, what could she possibly have missed in the city? Did she miss the R or X-rated videos? The dancing parlors? Her drinking partners?

The Lord had made it perfectly clear that no one was to turn around while fleeing the city. It was not an everyday issue. By turning around, Lot's wife was not just defying God; she was making a physical statement which said, "I don't want to be committed to God." It was a conscious decision on her part indicating that she liked the sin of the city more than the direction she was going with her family. As she came to the crossroads, God rendered judgment.

The question can be asked, "Was she still teachable in the Lord's way?" Only God can answer that, but we know that ultimately the time comes along when he says, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still . . ." (Rev. 22:11). Thus, the destruction of Lot's wife along with those in Sodom and Gomorrah simply hastened the result of their own choices, and served as a warning to the rest of mankind.

Lot and his daughters, as we know, were far from pure. They certainly had been affected by the influences of the evil city even though their original intentions were to stay aloof from Sodom's people.

"If God was so careful to secure their safety, how bad must those have been whom He left to their fate! Is it not clear that He saved all who came within the range of mercy's possibilities? There will not be one soul among the lost who had the faintest claim to be among the saved; and there will be a great many among the saved whose presence there will be a very great surprise to us."<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

How would you characterize Lot's wife? Why do you think Jesus urged us to "remember" her (see Luke 17:28-33)?

**EVIDENCE**  
**Key text:**  
**Genesis 19:26**

**"She turned around because of her longing for what was there."**

1. P. B. Baltes and K. W. Schaie, *Life-Span Developmental Psychology*, p. 257.  
2. F. B. Meyer, *Great Men of the Bible*, p. 47.

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Wednesday, August 21 81

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# Unwavering Trust

by Keith Plummer and Lori Ciccarelli

## HOW TO Key text: Isaiah 26:3

This week's lesson raises a practical question—if one's faith is inconsistent, how can a stable, harmonious relationship with God and the church community be achieved?

1. Most of us are very busy, yet we need to find at least a quarter of an hour out of 24 for quietness and meditation. During that quiet time, we should clear our minds of everyday business and listen to the sounds of beauty and harmony that come from God. This helps us develop a spiritual consistency we might call "Faith control," somewhat akin to emotional control. This cannot be developed by simply reading books, although that is helpful. The only sure method is by working at it regularly and persistently. The secret is to keep the mind quiet, avoid hasty reactions, and to keep the tempo down.

2. The daily quiet time should be followed with prayer. We need to stay in tune with God's harmony, which will refill us with peace of mind. We can derive more power from prayer when we use it as a supplication to be more Christlike, rather than as a petition. According to Ellen White, we are brought into connection with the mind of God through sincere prayer.<sup>1</sup>

Calvin Coolidge once said, "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence." Similarly, Ellen White tells us that, "Perseverance in prayer has been made a condition of receiving."<sup>2</sup>

3. Daily Bible study will strengthen both our faith and our intellect. As Paul pointed out to Timothy, in the Scriptures we "learn the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15, Jerusalem Bible).

4. Napoleon Hill has told the world that "Happiness is found in doing, not merely in possessing." Thus, acts of love are important in maintaining our own faith. We need to implement 1 Corinthians 13 by sharing time, money, and talent with those who are in need.

Faith is a trusting relationship involving unwavering adherence to principle and loyalty. Even though a person may develop faith in a positive manner, that faith can be damaged by dwelling on the negative. As we seek to develop as Christians, we should be especially careful about games that kill relationships in church. Especially dangerous are one-upmanship, bargaining, keeping score, and complaining to outsiders. In a marital relationship we need to be especially careful about jealousy, the silent treatment, withholding sex, using children, and buying love.<sup>3</sup>

The children of God are called to be representatives of Christ, showing forth the goodness and mercy of the Lord. As Jesus has revealed to us the true character of the Father, so we are to reveal Christ to the world and one another.<sup>4</sup>

## REACT

Are we guilty of playing the games the authors see as destroying faith and relationships in the church? In what ways? Do certain church practices inevitably lead to such games?

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Keith Plummer and Lori Ciccarelli are members of the Glendora SDA church.

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 67.  
2. *Ibid.*  
3. *From The Love Test* by Harold Bessel, N.Y. William Morrow & Co., 1984.  
4. *Steps to Christ*, p. 80.



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# The Last Laugh

by Van Perkins

"They all laughed at Christopher Columbus when he said the world was round." . . .

So go the lyrics of a popular song. But another lyricist might well respond:

"Christopher Columbus laughed at last to show us when he touched the New World's ground."

Abraham and Sarah, the king and queen of biblical faith, cynically laughed in their hearts when God said they would have a son at their advanced ages. But in a sense God laughed last. As a prelude (the first part to the joke) he even assigned the name Isaac, meaning "he laughs" to the unborn covenant son.

Can you imagine God's booming laughter of approval as he slaps the sinless universe on the back and points proudly at Abraham and his menservants fulfilling the painful rite of circumcision? "Look at them, everybody! Abraham believes me!"

Can you also imagine the pin prick of a tear in his eye as he senses the doubt that causes the laughter in the hearts of Abraham and Sarah? "Turn your ears away everyone. I'm sorry, but this time they think it's a joke."

Despite their laughter, there must also have been nights of tears for Abraham and Sarah—tears of regret, confession, and renewed resolve. Won't their spiritual children have the same experience?

Yet faith and purpose of heart are not born of tears alone, but also of mirth. Close relationships that unite hearts by choice and vow are not born of tears alone, but also of laughter.

Maybe there is some divinely appointed paradoxical connection between tears and laughter. Have you ever cried until you laughed or laughed until you almost collapsed in paroxysms of weeping? If not, talk to someone who has.

The tragedy-tinged lives of two famous comedians, Red Skelton and Richard Pryor, seem to bear out a strange correlation. If you have heard their serious testimonies of emotional and spiritual growth you know that they come from seeds of anguish. Laughter, tears, and growth seem to go together. If you have chuckled at their humor, you should smile in wonder at the faithfulness of Abraham's God.

In this worldly maze of seeming disappointments, taunting illusions, lead-heavy pessimism, and perverse rationalism—be glad that God's laughter is the last laughter. Ours may be a silent and personal sneer, sniggle or giggle, but his is the joyous roar that ripples from friend to friend.

## REACT

Look up the following passages on laughter: Gen. 17:15-19; 18:11-15; Eccl. 2:2; 3:4; 7:3; Psalm 126:2; Prov. 1:26; Luke 6:21; James 4:9. What do these suggest about the role of humor in the Christian life?

## OPINION

**Key text:**  
**Genesis**  
**17:17, 19**

**"Faith and purpose of heart are not born of tears alone, but also of mirth."**

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Friday, August 23 83

# ABRAHAM: AN EPIC OF FAITH, II

“ ‘Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son’ ” (Genesis 22:12, NIV).



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# No Laughing Matter!

by Minon Hamm

They weren't a likely couple to entrust with so much. Even after all the years of God's presence and leading, they had the most peculiar way of failing to come up to expectations. Remember the time the strangers who visited them turned out to be the Lord and two angels? Sarah had heard the Lord speaking her name, telling Abraham he would return to give her a son within the year. And Sarah laughed that cynical laugh of hers. Why, she and Abraham were old, as good as dead! And when the Lord, who heard what mortal ears couldn't, called her on it, she made it all worse by lying. "I did not laugh," she said. Sarah certainly wasn't some sort of super-saint.

Abraham wasn't any better. Shortly after that visit, with the news that he and Sarah would now receive the child of promise still ringing in his ears, Abraham panicked again and told that old half-lie about Sarah being his sister. He might have reasoned that, since the two of them had been singled out to have the child, God was not going to allow some king to kill him. After all, they'd been through all this before, down in Egypt. Under the circumstances, Abraham's action was neither protective of his wife nor trusting of God's care—nor actually very intelligent. "Father of the faithful"? Well, right then it didn't show.

Yet, these interludes of failure are actually what set off the climax of Abraham and Sarah's story so triumphantly. It's comforting to know that God works with imperfect faith, honors it, nourishes it, until at last it's capable of meeting the ultimate test. This strengthening of Abraham and Sarah's faith wasn't a sudden thing. It grew, along with the child they named Laughter to celebrate God's turning a bitter laugh into pure joy, until finally that faith took father and son to the crest of Mt. Moriah and permitted them to live that sandbox illustration of redemption—Calvary enacted in reverse. You recall, when the angel stopped Abraham's knife from plunging into his son's heart, the old man lifted his eyes to behold a ram caught by its horns in the brambles. So the son was freed, and the ram was sacrificed. At the crucifixion it was the evening sacrifice which escaped when the earthquake startled the knife out of the high priest's hand. And this time the Son, caught in the thornbush of our curse, was slain.

That is ultimately what sparks faith—Abraham's, Sarah's, and ours. Jesus' sacrifice enables human deadness to produce an offspring of promise, Christ reincarnated in mortal flesh, the hope of glory. It can happen to you. Sound impossible? Don't laugh.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Genesis 20-25

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# The Climactic Test

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Abraham demonstrates a faith in God so complete that he is willing to sacrifice that which he loves supremely, the one through whom all of God's promises to him were to be fulfilled; and ultimately, the covenant line is preserved through Isaac.

### 1. Another Lapse of Faith (read Gen. 20:1-18)

*"Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, 'She is my sister.' Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her" (Gen. 20:1, 2, NIV).*

Here we encounter another incongruity in the life of Abraham, completely uncharacteristic of a man of faith. He not only is cowed into using a verbal misrepresentation in order to preserve his own safety, but he repeats an error he made previously. The incident in Egypt (Gen. 12) is strikingly similar to the situation Abraham finds himself in with Abimelech, only the names and places are changed. One would think that he would have learned his lesson the first time, but not even Abraham was immune to falling in the same trap twice.

Happily, God yet again intervened in his behalf. Abimelech was confronted with the facts in a dream and the situation was righted before irreparable damage was done. "Abimelech was hereby kept from doing wrong, Abraham from suffering wrong, and Sarah from both."<sup>1</sup> Once again, a merciful God untangled the mess made by man and headed everything back in the right direction.

*Is the amount of patience and corrective care that God exercised toward Abraham unusual in comparison to his dealings with other biblical characters, or with you? Explain.*

### 2. The Heir Arrives (read Gen. 21:1-20)

*"Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him" (Gen. 21:1, 2, NIV).*

Again we see the recurring theme of the whole epic of Abraham: the consistent, caring faithfulness of God in response to man's inconsistency and betrayal. In spite of Abraham's failing and missteps, God repeatedly brings him back to the blueprint, and miraculously grants him the promised heir in Isaac. All of the doubting, impatience, and unbelief were forgiven and forgotten and everything was going according to plan again. . . .

Well, not quite everything. Abraham still had to face the consequences of his mistakes in that the bitterness of the Hagar affair still remained—and would not begin to abate until Hagar and Ishmael were sent into exile. Even then God didn't fail to care for his own. In the parched desert he came to their aid, reassuring Hagar

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that Ishmael too would father a great nation—because of the covenant made with Abraham.

We cannot escape this theme of God's faithfulness anywhere in the story. And it takes on an immense relevance when we realize that Abraham's God is our God too.

*Why was it so crucial that Abraham's offspring be reckoned through Isaac, not Ishmael (v. 13)?*

### 3. The Ultimate Test (read Gen. 22:1-19)

*"Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering. . . .'" (Gen. 22:2, NIV).*

Even four thousand years later, the command sounds most unusual—especially considering its source. Abraham must have been greatly puzzled. Little did he know that he was faced with a test—a supreme test of his faith in God. "Here is the trial of Abraham's faith, whether it continued so strong, so vigorous, so victorious, after a long settlement in communion with God, as it was at first, when by it he left his country: then it was made to appear that he loved God better than his father; now that he loved him better than his son."<sup>2</sup>

The seriousness and difficulty of this trial is virtually beyond imagination. The command was full of contradictions regarding God's view of murder and the fulfillment of the covenant as well. How could the same God both command murder and prohibit it? How could Isaac father a nation when he was to be killed? There was no rational explanation and Abraham recognized that. But rather than protest or question, Abraham methodically proceeded to obey God's command. He would have carried it out as well, if God had not stopped his arm in mid-descent. In proving his allegiance to God, Abraham and his descendants were presented with the perfect preview of what God would do in his Son—for each one of them.

Having passed the final, climactic test which irrefutably proved his allegiance to God, Abraham's divine calling was fulfilled. His primary remaining concern was seeing that Isaac had a good wife, so that the chosen family could continue to flourish according to God's plan (see ch. 24 and Evidence).

Wherein lies the greatness of Abraham? As with David, Peter, and the numerous other men of God, not in his consistent right choices, but in his willingness to acknowledge his mistakes, unquestioningly obey God's commands, and press onward in constant communion with him as the best of friends.

*What constitutes a "faith test?" Does God often "test" people in such a direct and active manner or are such "tests" more likely to come from our poor judgment? How does one make the distinction?*

L. R. C.

1. Matthew Henry's  
Commentary, p. 128.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

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# So That Men and Angels Might Understand

## TESTIMONY

Key text:

James 2:21-23

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.

"Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God." James 2:23. And Paul says, "They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Galatians 3:7. But Abraham's faith was made manifest by his works. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" James 2:21, 22. . . .

"During that three days' journey he had sufficient time to reason, and to doubt God."

Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unflinching obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false. . . . God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded.

. . . .When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham made answer, "God will provide Himself a lamb;" and when the father's hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man's salvation. 1 Peter 1:12.

## REACT

Was God asking Abraham to go against reason in the command to sacrifice Isaac? Does he ever ask us to do what is unreasonable?

Excerpted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 153, 155.



# A Wife for Isaac

by Ralph Neall

In the Bible record the most important thing Isaac did was to get married. Apparently his finding the right wife was crucial to the fulfillment of God's promises. Every marriage has important long-term results. It is useful to observe how this one was conducted.

In accordance with the custom of his time, Abraham took the initiative in finding a wife for his son, and Isaac did not refuse his plan. While our modern customs allow us to find our own partners, the principles in Abraham's mind are still valid. The reason he sent his chief servant Eliezer off to Mesopotamia was that he wanted a woman of his own clan and faith. While he was on good terms with the neighboring Canaanites, Abraham would not think of Isaac's marrying one of them, for they were idol worshippers. He knew that a mixed marriage was likely to be a disaster.

Abraham was sure that God was just as interested as he in finding the right wife for Isaac, and he was confident of divine guidance. "The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you and make your journey a success" he said as he sent Eliezer on his mission (see vv. 7, 8).

Sharing Abraham's faith, Eliezer prayed at the crucial point in his journey, and also gave God the credit when he spoke with Rebekah's family (see vv. 12, 27, 40, 42, 48, 56). Prayer had always been Abraham's practice, so it is no surprise to find his servant praying for direct guidance.

Eliezer's plan for knowing God's will was not of the fleece-on-the-ground variety. Eminently practical and common-sense, his test was well designed to find a girl who would be both hard working and courteous (see v. 14). It is no easy task to water thirsty camels after a long desert journey. And the girl who graciously agreed to do this task also turned out to be very beautiful and a virgin (v. 16). When the Lord has a chance to lead, he loves to make his children happy.

Eliezer came with a caravan of goods for the family of the bride-to-be. While a bride-price seems strange to us, the purpose behind it still carries a lesson for any woman looking for the right man—it demonstrated that the prospective groom had property and income enough to support a wife. Any suitor who came without the bride-price had to work for it (as Jacob did in this same household a generation later). A man's ability to support a wife is still a valid test.

Today there are some couples who see in Isaac and Rebekah an excuse for living together without a wedding. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The fact is that the whole story of Genesis 24 is the story of an Oriental wedding. The prayers, the journey, the bride-price, the approval of the girl's family, the public return to the home of the groom—this all *was* the wedding.

Isaac was delighted with the success of Eliezer's mission (see v. 67).

Those who follow the principles of this story will increase their chances of being just as happy with their own marriages.

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Genesis 24

"The whole story of Genesis 24 is the story of an Oriental wedding."

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# Knowing God Knows

by Rich Carlson

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Romans 12:3**

"Have Faith"—easy to say but not so easy to accomplish. Within our sanctioned set of clichés we have perpetuated a concept that is often used as "the thing to say" when we have no other helpful words of encouragement to someone in need of spiritual strength and direction. If we had enough of this faith we could move mountains and cast them into the sea, if we chose (1 Cor. 13:2).

The dilemma seems, however, to be discovering the correct method for obtaining that quantity of faith.

The faith of Abraham provides a clue that demands our attention.

1. **Abraham focused on God's plan.** Abraham's part was not to pray for a son because it was what he wanted but to learn God's plan. Isaac was God's idea not Abraham's. We have many plans but faith is laying those plans at God's feet, and concentrating on his plans.

2. **Abraham suffered many consequences from attempting to work God's plan out in his own way.** If God has an ultimate plan then he also has a "game plan." My purpose is not to see the ultimate goal and then devise my own method for attaining that goal. In fact, one of the best ways to know if something is God's plan is to watch for his supernatural way of bringing it to pass. He had a plan for Abraham and he had a way of bringing it about to ensure that the right Person got the credit. He also has a plan for our lives and a daily schedule that will make the attainment of that goal a reality. Our part is to develop the kind of relationship with him in which we come to know his voice, see his plan, and give him the credit.

3. **Abraham's faith in God's plan and his method were tested.** Expect to be tested. The best witness a Christian has is in what he believes when things are not going as he planned. Abraham had his faith tested and strengthened as God checked to see if Abraham really believed that God knew what he was doing. The ultimate goal is not just believing God has a plan or knowing that he also has a method for fulfilling that plan, but demonstrating to ourselves and a faithless world that more than any desires of our own we want God's will in his way. Faith is knowing that God knows.

## REACT

Do we have any role in working out the "game plan" for reaching God's ultimate goal for our lives? Is it necessarily lack of trust in him if we try to devise our own strategies?

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Rich Carlson is campus chaplain at Union College and Director of Collegiate Publications.

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# What God Remembers

by George Gibson

Hebrews 11, that showcase of the faithful, features Abraham in many of its verses. That should give us hope! Abraham had not always been faithful. When God promised a son, Abraham lacked the faith to believe that God meant what he said. Twice Abraham lacked the faith to believe that God would protect him if he admitted Sarah was his wife.

In spite of Abraham's lapses of faith, Isaac was born. Isaac became the pride and joy of Abraham and Sarah. But suddenly, it went sour. Isaac was to be sacrificed; not by death or disease but by Abraham's own hand. This was a test far more severe than Adam had been called to endure. God was giving Abraham the opportunity to develop a stronger faith. Abraham was human. He could think of all kinds of reasons why he shouldn't obey. He was old. God called for life to be preserved. Maybe it was a nightmare rather than God's voice. Perhaps this time Abraham was able to make a wiser decision than God.

But Abraham had come to know that God was just and that he needed to obey God's commands. He had come to better understand the relationship of faith and works. Abraham had some stern and unpleasant decisions to make. Abraham knew that there are times when action, based on faith, is needed, and not a rocking chair relationship.

Some want to work their way to heaven. Others want to develop a relationship with God and let works mysteriously appear on the tree of faith. Neither understand the relationship of faith and works. God gives us both faith and the ability to act. Some want only a fake faith. Other want only works.

God gives us some information. But he has also given us the power of choice. It falls our lot to make wise decisions. When we fail several times as did Abraham, God doesn't drop us. He gives us time to grow and then gives us more opportunities. But human choice is involved. We are active participants in the process. Every day we have tough decisions to make. How will you earn a living? Who, if anyone, should be your marriage partner? What should be your schedule today? God chooses to let us develop by working with us, allowing us to choose until we learn to choose properly or realize we really don't want to follow God's will. For God to do otherwise would deny us the power of choice which he has given to us.

We too must learn the relationship of faith and works. God has given us faith and the ability to act. Spend reasonable amounts of time seeking to know God and his will. Pray for guidance as you use common sense to make decisions. Act on those decisions. Don't be afraid to fail. Abraham did. But come to know God's will so well you can trust him. He'll give you opportunities to try again until you succeed. And God will forgive your failures and remember your successes if you continue to develop. If you don't believe it, reread Hebrews 11 and see what God remembers about Abraham.

## OPINION

**Key text:**  
**Hebrews**  
**11:17-19**

**"Perhaps this time Abraham was able to make a wiser decision than God."**

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George Gibson is an assistant professor of history at Union College.



# JACOB: AN EPIC OF CONFLICT

“ I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you’ ” (Genesis 28:15, NIV).



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# He Sends a Ladder

by Debbie Chittick

Frantically I scribbled down notes, and tried to comprehend what the pastor presented. "No, so many people get mixed up on that very point. They think that you've got to be good and give up your sins before you come to Christ, but that is totally untrue. In fact, it's impossible! You come to Christ because you love him, and he takes you just the way you are."

My thoughts drifted and his voice faded from my consciousness. I remember back across the years to when I was a young girl living in Tanzania. For morning worship we had read the story of Jacob, the birthright, and the blessing he had stolen. It left me puzzled. Obviously, Jacob had used deception, a downright no-no to gain what he had wanted. And yet the ladder dream meant that God was on his

side. I found it peculiar that God would be on the side of a deceiver.

Frowning in contemplation I went into the kitchen and confronted my mother.

"Well," she said, "do you remember when you lied to me about the missing chocolate bar?"

How could I forget? It still hurt to sit down. "Um, yes," I grinned sheepishly.

"Well," she continued, "just because you made a mistake, I didn't walk away and leave you alone, did I?" The point was well made and I ran away happy and satisfied that God hadn't made a mistake by sending a ladder down to Jacob.

A nudge jolted me out of my reverie. It was time for the closing hymn. "Yes," I thought, "He still sends me that ladder."

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:

Genesis  
25:19-29:30

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# The Deceiver and the Deceived

## LOGOS

**Theme:** The life of Jacob is marked by conflict, brought on largely by his own duplicity and that of his relatives. Despite this, God extends to him the grace and guidance of the covenant relationship.

### 1. The Twins (read Gen. 25:19-34)

*"'Look, I am about to die,' Esau said. 'What good is the birthright to me?'" (v. 32 NIV).*

God foretold before the birth of Esau and Jacob the general outcome of their lives (vs. 23). This was not predestination. God merely said what *will* be and not what *must* be. The choices each one made determined the divergent result. Esau chose immediacy, self-gratification in the present. He was a pragmatist, after all, what good is a birthright when you're hungry now! Jacob chose the future. He was a dreamer, content to stay home and work in the family industry. Not that this made him more pious than his older brother—blackmail is no saintly attribute—but his was the choice of things unseen (2 Cor. 4:18) though often his methods of acting on this were improper.

*Are some personality types more prone to do "wrong" or be "unreligious?" What characteristics does God look for in those he chooses to perform some special work?*

### 2. Isaac and Abimelech (read Gen. 26)

*"That night the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you'" (v. 24, NIV).*

When reading the first part of this chapter, one is tempted to make the comment "some people just never learn!" Abraham made the same mistake twice, and neither time did the cover lie work. And here Isaac does the same thing—the old "my wife is my sister" line. Yet, God forgave. The incident passed and Isaac "reaped a hundredfold because the Lord blessed him" (vs. 12, NIV). In fact the Lord blessed Isaac so much that his neighbors became jealous and started to cause him problems. But instead of retaliating, Isaac remained calm and simply moved away from them. This continued until it became so obvious that God was blessing him that his neighbors came and made a treaty with him.

*To what extent do the things I do change my status with God? What can we learn from Isaac's method of conflict control?*

### 3. Scheming Deceit (read Gen. 27)

*"Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made. He went to his father and said 'My father . . . I am Esau'" (27:17-19, NIV).*

Impatience with God's plans often causes individuals to hurry

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them. We saw this with Abraham marrying Hagar in his attempt to sire a great nation. And now we see Jacob tricking his father into giving him something God had already promised him. But hurrying God's plans never works. As a result of his deception Jacob had to flee his home to escape the rage he awoke in his brother. He fled with his father's ill-gotten blessing, fearing he had forfeited its realization.

*How does one differentiate between hurrying God's plans, and doing all that one can, then letting God do the rest?*

#### 4. Jacob's Flight and Marriage (read Gen. 28:1-29:30)

*"I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. . . . I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go" (28:13, 15, NIV).*

Sure that God must have forsaken him and ashamed of living up to his name ("deceiver,") Jacob began his flight to Paddan Aram in the darkness of depression and regret. Yet God, ever patient, ever loving, showed just how near he was and caused Jacob to exclaim "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God" (v. 17, NIV). Notice, in revealing himself, God, despite Jacob's selfish trickery, makes a statement in the present. "I am with you" and a promise for the future, "I will watch over you" (see v. 15). And he was. Jacob arrived at Laban's home and started working for his wife and the seven years seemed only a few days (see 29:20). And though he was tricked into marrying Leah, he also got Rachel, the one he loved, and there in Paddan Aram he prospered.

*Are any implications of Jacob's courting ritual relevant today?*

E. R. M.

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# The Ladder of Redemption

## TESTIMONY

Key Text:  
Genesis 28:12-15

Threatened with death by the wrath of Esau, Jacob went out from his father's home a fugitive; but he carried with him the father's blessing; Isaac had renewed to him the covenant promise, and had bidden him, as its inheritor, to seek a wife of his mother's family in Mesopotamia. Yet it was with a deeply troubled heart that Jacob set out on his lonely journey. With only his staff in his hand he must travel hundreds of miles through a country inhabited by wild, roving tribes. . . .

The evening of the second day found him far away from his father's tents. He felt that he was an outcast, and he knew that all this trouble had been brought upon him by his own wrong course. The darkness of despair pressed upon his soul, and he hardly dared to pray. But he was so utterly lonely that he felt the need of protection from God as he had never felt it before. With weeping and deep humiliation he confessed his sin, and entreated for some evidence that he was not utterly forsaken. Still his burdened heart found no relief. He had lost all confidence in himself, and he feared that the God of his fathers had cast him off.

But God did not forsake Jacob. His mercy was still extended to His erring, distrustful servant. The Lord compassionately revealed just what Jacob needed—a Saviour. He had sinned, but his heart was filled with gratitude as he saw revealed a way by which he could be restored to the favor of God.

Wearied with his journey, the wanderer lay down upon the ground, with a stone for his pillow. As he slept he beheld a ladder, bright and shining, whose base rested upon the earth, while the top reached to heaven. Upon this ladder angels were ascending and descending; above it was the Lord of glory, and from the heavens His voice was heard: "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father and the God of Isaac." The land whereon he lay as an exile and fugitive was promised to him and to his posterity, with the assurance, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

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

**"The Lord compassionately revealed just what Jacob needed—a Saviour."**

Excerpted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 183, 184.

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# With Fear and Trembling

by Cary DeCamp

Righteousness by faith has become the crusade of the 80's. And it certainly seems a step closer to a valid relationship with God than the "I do it because it's the law" method. But has the doctrine of righteousness by faith taken a trend pop psychology has taken? Is the "I'm OK, You're OK" concept of human relations carrying over into our relationship with God?

Jacob was both well off (Gen. 31:1) and well cared for (32:22). He was strong physically (32:24) and spiritually (32:10). In short, he was probably not the person to need a "crutch" enabling him to hobble through life. He lived life with vigor. But Jacob's spiritual life, culminating in that long night in the countryside he spent wrestling with an angel of God (see next lesson), was characterized by struggle, torment, pain, and stubbornness.

C. S. Lewis has observed that pain is inherent in life. "Fixed laws, consequences. . . the whole natural order, are at once the limits within which [our] life is confined and also the sole condition under which any such life is possible. Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself."<sup>1</sup>

A Christian life is one of struggle. The greatest man has accomplished, his brightest rays of inspiration, have been in the darkest conditions. Beethoven's Ninth was composed in deafness, T. S. Eliot's "Four Quartets" in the darkest hours of a mystical experience, and the list goes on. If man's temporary accomplishments reach their greatest heights from handicap and despair, where should eternal life and its consequences be conceived?

"Faith was a task of a whole lifetime," wrote Kierkegaard, "because it was assumed that dexterity in faith is not acquired in a few days or weeks. Then the tired oldster drew near to his last hour, having fought the good fight and kept the faith, his heart was still young enough not to have forgotten that fear and trembling which chastened the youth, which the man indeed held in check, but which no man quite outgrows."<sup>2</sup> Thus, in an age far less confusing—without Freud, psychoanalytic research and positive thinking—Kierkegaard was warning that faith, fear and trembling were being replaced by a do-it-yourself religion.

Righteousness by faith is, or should be, the crux of Christianity. But it is not a key to freedom from the labor of reaching God. God paid the ultimate price to reach us. Can we not struggle the same way he struggled for us? Once again Kierkegaard warns, "Everything [today] is to be had at such a bargain that it is questionable whether in the end there is anybody who will want to bid."<sup>3</sup> Jacob's blessing was not received at a bargain price. Our lives were not redeemed at a bargain price.

## REACT

If we are saved by grace, why should there be any need for struggle in the Christian life?

## EVIDENCE

Key Text:  
Luke 13:24

**"Dexterity in faith is not acquired in a few days or weeks."**

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*.  
2. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness unto Death*, p. 23.  
3. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

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# A Ladder to Success

by David H. Thiele

**How To**  
**Key Text:**  
**Thessalonians**  
**5:16-24**

Like Jacob we have great expectations placed on us. And perhaps in trying to fulfill those expectations, we accepted the old adage, "God helps those who help themselves," taking it to mean that we must take control of our own lives. And then, like Jacob, we end up in a flight of despair caused by our utter failure. But when we have reached our lowest, when we are ready to give up on ourselves, Jesus reveals himself as the "ladder" of true spiritual success. As our mediator, he extends success to us, and we can receive it by entering and maintaining a relationship with him.

Maintaining a relationship with God cultivates and nurtures the trust that allows him to control our lives. Do you despair of meeting the standard that is set before you? Is your belief sufficient for times of stress that can so often catch you off guard? If you have any doubt about the strength of your relationship with God and the success of the sanctification process in your life, here are seven guidelines:

- 1) "Rejoice evermore." 1 Thess. 5:16.
- 2) "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thess. 5:17.
- 3) "In everything give thanks." 1 Thess. 5:18.
- 4) "Despise not prophesyings." 1 Thess. 5:20. (Prophesying is more than having visions. It also involves rebuke and chastening that is meant to lead one back to God. Heb. 12:5-11, 25.)
- 5) "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." 1 Thess. 5:21.
- 6) "Abstain from all appearance of evil." 1 Thess. 5:22.

The promise of success can be found in the next two verses. We will be "preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 23) through the power of the one who is "faithful" and "will do it" (v. 24). If we will only put forth the same effort into maintaining that relationship with God as we do in our planning the other areas of our lives, that success he extends will be ours.

## REACT

What have you found to be particularly helpful, or unhelpful, in your efforts to maintain a vital relationship with God? Be as specific as possible.

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# The Prodigal Patriarch

by Kurt Davis

Why did the birthright with its special covenant blessing fall to a man like Jacob whose very name means deceit?

The question screams from the pages of Genesis as Jacob moves from trickery to treachery to larceny in a few short chapters. Every phase of his life was smeared with scandal. As a youth, he bribed his brother. He later deceived his father then defrauded his crafty father-in-law, Laban. As an old man he doted on his favorite wife's sons to the relative neglect of the others. Jacob a patriarch?

What was so wrong, after all, with Esau? From the biblical account he appears to have been candid and unassuming, though perhaps impulsive where Jacob was a schemer. Esau was the workingman-type who must have enjoyed honestly and heartily the result of his hunts when he cooked his game for his father.

So why didn't Esau inherit the birthright as he should have? Perhaps the answer is revealed in the characters of the twins. Esau appears to have been one dimensional, almost animal in nature. He was a creature of the moment. Not for him to nurture gardens or flocks: when he wanted to eat, he went to find and kill his dinner. If he couldn't do that, he bought it, never mind the cost. Not for him to work seven years to win the girl he loved; he wedded his wives perfunctorily from the neighboring clans (Gen. 26:34).

When Jacob bribed him for the birthright, Esau didn't stop to consider it lost. Only when it later slipped through his fingers like a fleet deer did he bitterly sense what he had missed. But even then his anger didn't drive him to follow and kill Jacob, and his anger—if he was still angry—was later easily appeased. We read that "Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him . . . and kissed him." (Gen. 33:4 NIV).

There was nothing wrong with Esau being the way he was. That was Esau—impulsive and generous. But he had no depth; he didn't struggle with right and wrong within himself. He seemed amoral. He acted and reacted as an animal might. It wasn't wrong, but neither was it right, just as it isn't wrong or right for a cat to kill a beautiful bird.

But a patriarch must be spiritual, must have a soul, must have more than one dimension. Perhaps that's why an immoral Jacob was more suitable than an amoral Esau. Jacob could do wrong—could choose to do wrong, but he could also choose to do right and, unlike Esau, he was sensitive to the distinction. It was this dynamic struggle that made Jacob a spiritual man who coveted his spiritual heritage.

Jacob didn't just wrestle with God that one evening across the river. He wrestled with God every day of his life just as the good and evil struggled within him throughout his life. No wonder his name was later changed to Israel, which means, "He struggles with God"—not struggled, *struggles*. That struggling gave him a depth which fitted him for the birthright and the position of patriarch.

**OPINION**  
**Key Text:**  
**Philippians**  
**2:12, 13**

**"It was the dynamic struggle that made Jacob a spiritual man."**

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# JACOB: AN EPIC OF CONFLICT, II

“ ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome’ ” (Genesis 32:28, NIV).





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# Bethel II

by Lynn Neumann McDowell

Jacob remembered the Bethel Talks. He'd left convinced that peace was assured. He would have a new country, a fresh start. He felt—peace.

But that was years ago. For a lifetime, it seemed, he'd been fighting on too many fronts—with his twin, with his in-laws, with neighbors, wives, and sons; even with God and with himself.

Taking refuge in his tent from the sun and rankling shepherds, Jacob closed his eyes. Like many wars, his had started with a little skirmish. Esau always was a little touchy about his hairy arms, Jacob joked to himself, trying to counter even the thought of conflict. But with a fight in progress only ten feet away, it was no use.

Dan and Reuben were picking on young Joseph—again—and Rachel would be stomping off to Leah's tent—again—probably throwing that mandrake incident in her face. Then Leah would call her a faithless, pagan idol thief, and on they would go.

It was a shame really. They were both good women when they were apart. Of course this family wasn't quite like the one he'd grown up in; there'd been only one queen of that household.

Funny—whenever he thought of his mother he saw her holding out the coat she'd made for his tenth birthday. Dumb kid—he hadn't even thanked her. Rebekah died without knowing how he

loved the gift because by the time he realized it, he was afraid to come home.

Fortunately things with Esau were pretty much patched up now. They still got along better when they were apart though. Those sons of Esau's were godless rabble-rousers, not fit company for his angelic sons.

Angelic—ha! Murdering liars, plundering thieves—that's what the widows of Shechem called them. Jacob winced.

Anguish twisted his mouth. His boys were sons of Jacob, not Israel. They remembered too exactly the scenes between him and Laban, the slick deals trailing from here to Haran. He was Jacob the Liar, the Cheat. What more could he expect from his sons?

What more—Jacob's eyes shot open—what more should he expect from his God?

Perhaps nothing. Bethel had been an encounter with power and honor and the glory that might have made him strong. It had been a chance to become Israel. It had been real, that new start, but he had faltered.

Jacob rose hastily and paced to shake off the grey thoughts gathered in his tent. Bethel might be miles away, but the God of Abraham and Isaac does not change. And had not he, Jacob, wrestled with God and won? What Yahweh pronounced "Israel" would indeed become Israel. By his power. Someday.

God smiled, and began planning Bethel II.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Genesis 29:3  
35:19

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# The Salvation of Jacob

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Jacob's family conflicts bring anxiety and grief, but in his struggle with God he learns the meaning of true faith.

### 1. Jacob and Laban (read Gen. 29:31-31:55)

*"Then the Lord said to Jacob 'Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you'" (31:3, NIV).*

A lesson in family harmony, Jacob does not provide. In fact, parts of Genesis 29 and 30 read like an overdone soap opera. The bickering, the wife substitution, the jealousies between the wives and their children, illustrate the negative results of a torn home. Neither does Jacob provide an example of open, honest business dealings. That episode with peeled poplar branches (see Gen. 31:43) can not be called totally above board. So it is no wonder that he was so prompt in obeying God's command to go back home that he failed to inform Laban of his departure. Then there is also the question of why Rachel, the wife of a God-fearing man would bother to steal her father's idols.

Yes, Jacob does fall short of the "pious Christian" mold. But he was sensitive to the voice of God and when God spoke, Jacob obeyed. And God blessed.

*What does this portion of Jacob's life demonstrate about God's dealings with people? What hope does this inspire?*

### 2. Jacob and Esau (read Gen. 32, 33)

*"The man asked him, 'What is your name?'"*

*"'Jacob,' he answered."*

*"Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome'" (32:27, 28, NIV).*

The conflicts with Laban resolved, Jacob could now concentrate on the dreaded conflict ahead. The fear of his anticipated meeting with the brother he swindled grew the closer he came to home territory. Though he recognized that angels were with him, he well remembered Esau's bloody rage. And anything Jacob thought might appease this wrath, he did. But even dividing his company into two groups for safety failed to quell the rising trepidation.

Here perhaps the hard lessons he had learned in the past came to fruition. Or maybe, realizing there was no trick he could pull off to save himself, no proverbial card to play, Jacob went out alone to pray. Whichever the case Jacob made the right decision. And with the answer to his prayer came the unshakeable understanding, not to mention relief, that his efforts were not to be relied on, but God's instead. More than this however, Jacob himself was at peace. The guilt of his past fraud that must have nagged the corners of his brain for years, was purged. And the name that foretold and till now illustrated his character, was changed from Jacob—"one who deceives" to Israel—"one who struggles with God."

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*Why did God choose to answer Jacob's prayer with a wrestling match and a crippled leg? Why did God wait to answer Jacob's prayers until Jacob was "at the end of his rope?" Is God more active at these times, or do we just see him a little more clearly?*

### **3. Trouble in Shechem, Revival in Bethel (read Gen. 34-35)**

*"Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. Jacob named the place where God had talked with him Bethel" (35:14, 15, NIV).*

This next portion of the book of Genesis starts off, "Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land" (34:1, NIV). And here she got into trouble. Some have used this to illustrate the dangers of "associating with those in the world." But even a quick reading will show her family life not to have been much better. The point, rather, lies in the actions of her brothers.

A wrong was committed but this was acknowledged and amended were attempted. These reconciliatory overtures, however, were spurned by Dinah's brothers. And in revenge for the rape of their sister they slaughtered the Shechemites while the males of Shechem were immobilized by the brothers' trickery.

Jacob was horrified. Not only did he fear revenge from Shechemite neighbors, but he saw his own character flaws reproduced in the actions of his sons. Reformation was needed. So he purged his household of false gods and then took the family to Bethel to worship the true God, the same one who met him there years before. And here God met him again and confirmed to Jacob the covenant made to Abraham and Isaac.

*What implications from the story of Dinah and the Shechemites can be applied to the forgiveness of a church community? What does the study of the lives of Jacob and Esau, suggest about the basis on which God accepts or rejects individuals?*

E. R. M.



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# “Except Thou Bless Me”

## **ESTIMONY**

**Key text:**  
**Genesis 32:26**

It was in a lonely, mountainous region, the haunt of wild beasts and the lurking place of robbers and murderers. Solitary and unprotected, Jacob bowed in deep distress upon the earth. It was midnight. All that made life dear to him were at a distance, exposed to danger and death. Bitterest of all was the thought that it was his own sin which had brought this peril upon the innocent. With earnest cries and tears he made his prayer before God. Suddenly a strong hand was laid upon him. He thought that an enemy was seeking his life, and he endeavored to wrest himself from the grasp of his assailant. In the darkness the two struggled for the mastery. Not a word was spoken, but Jacob put forth all his strength, and did not relax his efforts for a moment. While he was thus battling for his life, the sense of his guilt pressed upon his soul; his sins rose up before him, to shut him out from God. But in his terrible extremity he remembered God's promises, and his whole heart went out in entreaty for His mercy. The struggle continued until near the break of day, when the stranger placed his finger upon Jacob's thigh, and he was crippled instantly. The patriarch now discerned the character of his antagonist. He knew that he had been in conflict with a heavenly messenger, and this was why his almost superhuman effort had not gained the victory. It was Christ, "the Angel of the covenant," who had revealed Himself to Jacob. The patriarch was now disabled and suffering the keenest pain, but he would not loosen his hold. All penitent and broken, he clung to the Angel; "he wept, and made supplication" (Hosea 12:4), pleading for a blessing. He must have the assurance that his sin was pardoned. Physical pain was not sufficient to divert his mind from this object. His determination grew stronger, his faith more earnest and persevering, until the very last. The Angel tried to release Himself; He urged, "Let Me go, for the day breaketh;" but Jacob answered, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Had this been a boastful, presumptuous confidence, Jacob would have been instantly destroyed; but his was the assurance of one who confesses his own unworthiness, yet trusts the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God.

**"It was Christ,  
'the Angel of  
the covenant,'  
who had  
revealed  
Himself to  
Jacob."**

Excerpted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*,  
pp. 196, 197.

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# Evidence Is Not Adequate

by Ken Downing

In a brilliant essay on the nature of biblical truth, Emil Brunner examines the historic conflict between objective and subjective theological views in the Christian church. The book, *Truth as Encounter*, proposes that it is a false conflict which the Bible does not address. "The objective-subjective antithesis cannot be applied to the Word of God and to faith."<sup>1</sup>

An understanding of biblical truth can only be found in the relationship between God and man, Brunner suggests. "It is not a timeless or static relation, arising from the world of ideas—and only for such is doctrine an adequate form: rather, the relation is an event, and hence narration is the proper form. The decisive word form in the language of the Bible is not the substantive, as in Greek, but the verb, the word of action."<sup>2</sup>

In the narrative in Genesis we find this illustrated in the story of Jacob. After leaving home as a consequence of deceit, Jacob was continually reassured that God was still with him in spite of his mistakes (see Gen. 28:10-22; 31:1-13, 24-29; 32:1, 2).

Yet in spite of the overwhelming objective evidence that the all-mighty God would bless and protect him, Jacob withered in terror when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him. He divided his people into two companies, hoping one would escape, and desperately pled with God to fulfill his promise of protection (32:9-12).

Jacob understood the objective truth of God's promises and he had had some deeply personal experiences with God. But in the intensity of the existential crisis he faced he could not depend on any dogma or past experiences. Jacob discovered new truth in an encounter with God, resulting in a realization of absolute helplessness and dependency. He struggled in pain to hang on to God until he received a blessing and he emerged a new man with a new name. It was an encounter that validated all prior objective evidence and integrated all the lesser subjective experiences of his life.

All prior evidence, whether objective statements or subjective experiences, is of little value in the present moment unless we are open to expanding our concepts of truth when we encounter God, usually at a moment of deep crisis. And it is critical to note that it is God who initiates that encounter. We have the choice to respond affirmatively and grow—or to choose to hang on to what glimpses of truth we have found in our past and stagnate spiritually. The issue is not one of subjective or objective truth but of being open to grow in all realms as God encounters us.

## REACT

Does continual openness to new truth mean that one never holds to any understanding of truth with absolute certainty?

**EVIDENCE**  
**Key text:**  
**John 5:38, 39**

**"Jacob was continually reassured that God was still with him in spite of his mistakes."**

1. Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, p. 85.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

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# Wrestling for Victory

by John Abbott

## HOW TO

Key text:  
John 17:3

Can you name the last wrestler to win his match by never getting into the ring, by even completely avoiding the match? Or can you think of the last Christian to win his spiritual wrestling matches by avoiding the "ring"? What is the Christian's "wrestling match" and what is the "ring"? Jacob's night of wrestling with the Angel gives us some clues.

Many times Christians are content to spend just a few moments with Jesus which leaves their souls undrawn to God. They spend just enough time to calm their consciences. Jacob, on the other hand, came to the point where he longed for the *fullness* of God's blessings. He wanted *everything* God had to offer.

The problem is that the human heart does not naturally long for everything God has to offer; which is simply everything we need and more. Therefore, God will at times challenge us to a match. These times of unrest and struggle challenge us to wrestle for the assurance we need to see us through. Why does God allow us to wrestle when we know it is his will for us to receive his blessing? Perhaps it is because we will never reach the destination of our Christian journey unless we realize at key points along the way that all would be lost were it not for God's care and loving intervention in our lives.

How then can we receive victory with the Angel as Jacob did? Jacob sought with all of his heart to gain a much needed victory from God. He sought so much because he needed so much. His first step towards victory was getting into the "ring" (after all, a wrestler cannot pin anyone down unless he is in the ring). The "ring" can be described as our circle of communion with God through Bible study and prayer. This ring of communication is our training and preparation for the wrestling matches we shall be challenged with as we progress in our Christian walk.

Second, after being crippled by the Angel, Jacob finally came to the realization that he was powerless to pin down his foe. He continued to wrestle, but with a new purpose—to pin down the blessing of God. Success in our spiritual struggles come through channeling our energies in the right direction—toward a relationship with God rather than toward conquering the enemy on our own strength.

Be happy and thankful the next time you are challenged to a match. Though your burden may seem hard, remember it's only because God is seeking to change your name to Israel—a name of victory and trust!

## REACT

Does God sometimes manipulate events to send us adversity to struggle with? Why or why not?

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# Night Fight

by John McDowell

For a story about a patriarch, Jacob's adventures seem a little weak. His story has nothing of the heroic grandeur of Abraham whose journeys and battles read with an epic quality. Jacob also pales against his father, Isaac, a man of courage, the survivor from Mount Moriah. When reading Jacob's story one cannot escape the sense that here is a mommy's boy given to deception, weeping, and running away—hardly the stuff to make a patriarch.

The story deals mostly with domestic problems and squabbles. Jacob is tricked into marrying Leah, giving a kind of justice to his own deceit practiced on Esau. A long section is given to the rivalry between his two wives to bare sons in a game of one-upmanship that included the maids and the bargaining for the right to sleep with Jacob (Gen. 29:31-35; 30:1-24). He spends his time complaining about his wages, and his only accomplishment in his twenty years with Laban is that he is able to manipulate the breeding of sheep and goats to his advantage (30:37-43). When he decides to leave he runs away when Laban is not around. Rachel, the favorite wife, steals her father's idols without bothering to tell Jacob. And one wonders why she stole the idols in the first place. Did she feel she needed some extra insurance because she was insecure about Jacob's ability to protect her? Did she distrust Jacob's God because of Jacob's cowardice? We are not told, but the questions remain.

What then makes this weakling who was manipulated by others the father of Israel? When we come to the answer the story seems unbalanced. We are told more than we want to know about his domestic problems, yet the most important event in his life—the event that puts him on par with his father and grandfather, the wrestling match at Jabbok—gets shortchanged in just ten verses (Gen. 32:22-32). The story of that night is sparse, enigmatic.

Jacob, a man desperately afraid, waits alone. He has nowhere to run. The night before he'd prayed, claiming a promise (Gen. 32:9-12). He now waits. Night falls. A night of silent wrestling with a stranger. Only near dawn do they speak.

Who was Jacob's assailant? Perhaps in one sense the fight was with himself. A fight with his own failures and fears, a fight to make him worthy of both his heritage and his destiny. Yet his assailant was more than just an alter ego. The story goes on to suggest that Jacob wrestled with God himself. Jacob states, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30, RSV). And then there is the name change: Jacob to Israel, "He who strives with God." Is his own name, Jacob, now no longer good enough? After the struggle he was something more. The dawn breaks on new spiritual maturity.

Abraham, Isaac, and even Esau may have been more heroic figures, but Jacob, if we will admit it, is easier to identify with. He is weak, yet God engages him and he is able to prevail. If Jacob can win, so can we. God seeks involvement. If we are to be a modern Israel we too must *strive with God*. All things are possible.

## OPINION

Key text:  
Genesis 32:30

"If Jacob  
can win,  
so can we."

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# JOSEPH: AN EPIC OF DESTINY

"But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness . . . and gave him success in whatever he did" (Genesis 39:20, 21, 23, NIV).



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# The Missing Ingredient

by Lyndon McDowell

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Genesis  
37:1-41:40

Everyone admires and envies success, especially when that success is accompanied by wealth and power. Those who admire and envy, however, seldom give a thought to the long years of disappointment, the many days of discouragement, and the hours of despair that are so often encountered before success is achieved. Most people give up.

Victor Frankl, recalling his efforts to survive concentration camp, wrote "Man is not fully conditioned and determined; he determines himself whether to give in to conditions or stand up to them. In other words, man is ultimately self-determining. Man does not simply exist, but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment." Joseph was like that. He refused to surrender to fate.

It could easily have been otherwise. The favored son of a doting father, his early years could easily have disqualified him for greatness but there were two things that saved him. In his early childhood he had been taught to love and trust God by the repetition of God's dealings with his father Jacob.<sup>1</sup> And faced with the fearful prospect of slavery, after the first agony of despair, "his soul thrilled with the high resolve to prove himself true to God."<sup>2</sup>

Weighed against these factors were the bitterness of betrayal by his brothers, the

fascination of wealth, and the allurements of high society. The true greatness of Joseph must be seen in his determination not to allow bitterness to sour his life and in his resistance to those enticements that surrounded him on every side. How often in discouragement he must have relived "the distress of his soul" and remembered how he pleaded with his brothers only to have them meet his cries with merciless indifference.

The invitation by Potiphar's wife was obviously no sudden wish on her part. Thrown frequently into her company, Joseph must have perceived her growing interest in him. Frequent furtive looks, the demand for trivial services that would necessitate his presence near her, the conversations, ostensibly about business, but tending toward the personal and emotional, the subtle body language messages—all of these must have entered into his mental computer for Satan to throw on the screen of his mind. In his hours of loneliness they could so easily have fired the flames of sexual fantasies. But Joseph indulged in no tempting experimentation to see if she was serious. There were no mildly provocative words or motions to "try her out."

Joseph's morality was not the result of one heroic refusal to surrender to a woman's demands; it was in his refusal to exploit the emotional

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relationship that slowly developed, and his decision not to act on the feelings that were naturally aroused within himself. He never abdicated his personal responsibility as a follower of the true God. Joseph not only refused her invitations to lie by her, but he refused "to be with her." St. Francis of Assisi would have smilingly approved, for he wrote: "I know what I ought to do, but I know not what I would do were I to remain in the occasion of sin."

Joseph lived by what has become the missing ingredient in modern morality: one's

personal accountability to God. "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? (Gen. 39:9)."

Joseph displayed another glorious truth. Forgiveness, given fully, is a gift to yourself as well as to those to whom it is extended. Hatred and resentment festers. One must hold it, remember it, and rehearse it. It sours the whole life, it colors every action, and it ultimately destroys one's destiny.

Joseph forgave. That forgiveness paved the way for Providence to save Joseph's family and to forge a nation.

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1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 213.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

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# The Dreamer

**Theme:** Convinced of his special destiny at an early age, Joseph remains faithful to God despite incredible adversity, and ultimately rises to prominence in the government of Egypt. **LOGOS**

## 1. Joseph and His Brothers (read Gen. 37)

There was not much love lost between Joseph and his brothers. After Jacob designed a new "technicolor dream coat" specifically for his most loved and favored son, Joseph, the relationship between the brothers deteriorated even further. In his innocence, Joseph added to the growing envy and hatred by relating his dreams about his future superiority. *"We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it"* (37:7, NIV). The brothers' reaction was of intense scorn and resentment toward Joseph, who not only bore the distinction of being the apple of their father's eye but also dared to dream of ruling over them one day.

This antagonism grew until it resulted in a confrontation between Joseph and his brothers that almost proved to be fatal. In a way the outcome was worse than death—it was the subhuman existence of a slave. Reuben, the eldest, had made a vain effort to rescue Joseph by opposing the idea of killing him, suggesting rather that they throw him into the cistern. His intention was to free Joseph at a later time. This plan backfired. Reuben failed to take a firm stand against his other brothers' actions. He had tried to compromise by siding with them in hope of staying in their favor and also at the same time trying to save Joseph. In a way he lost on both accounts. Joseph was sold into slavery and he had to share in deceiving his father as well as losing the respect usually accorded to the eldest. (Compare Gen. 42:37, 38 and Gen. 43:8-11.)

*What lessons for parenting can be drawn from Jacob's treatment of Joseph and his other sons? Can parents be impartial in giving love to their children? Is there ever a need to limit a display of parental affection toward their children?*

*Is it ever proper to make compromises to avoid offending or alienating others?*

## 2. Joseph and Potiphar's Wife (read Gen. 39)

*"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"* (Gen. 39:9, NIV).

All that Joseph touched seemed to turn to gold. Potiphar placed him second in command of his affairs. At this climax of a rags to riches story, the wife of Potiphar enters the scene. Looking for control or perhaps just out of pure passion she attempts to seduce Joseph. *"She caught him by his cloak and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house"* (Gen. 39:12, NIV). Joseph resisted and it cost him not only his position

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but also landed him in prison. Joseph perhaps could have rationalized the temptation by simply believing that he was following the commands of an owner to a slave. Yet Joseph knew that he had only one true master which was God, and it was God and his higher principles that he allowed to mold and direct his life.

*Many use this story to illustrate the point that the best way to resist temptation is to avoid being around it. This, however, Joseph could not do since he worked in the presence of temptations every day. If then, one can not "flee from" temptation, how can one fortify himself against yielding to it?*

### 3. Joseph, the Baker, and the Cupbearer (read Gen. 40)

*"Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams" (40:8, NIV).*

In dire circumstances, where most would have given up, Joseph persevered in his faithfulness and God gave him success. Joseph was given a position of responsibility in the jail similar to that in Potiphar's household.

His fellow inmates, the chief cupbearer and baker, had fallen from the Pharaoh's graces. They each had a perplexing dream, so disturbing that Joseph was asked to interpret them. Pointing to God as the source of his insight on dreams, Joseph then forecasted accurately the cupbearer's restored status and the baker's death. It was through these dreams that God was preparing Joseph to interpret a dream that would be of future importance.

*Does God still give dreams with religious significance today?*

### 4. Pharaoh Dreams (read Gen. 41:1-40)

*"And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt" (41:33, NIV).*

Joseph's ticket to freedom finally came after two years of patiently waiting for the chief cupbearer to make good on his promise to make an appeal to Pharaoh on Joseph's behalf. When Pharaoh himself had a dream that needed interpreting, Joseph, through the cupbearer's recommendation, was called upon. In addition to interpreting the dream, Joseph offered a detailed plan for how Pharaoh should prepare for the upcoming famine. Joseph was the obvious choice to administer the plan, and Pharaoh was so impressed that he went even further, making Joseph the highest authority in the land, second only to himself.

After years of undeserved hardship, Joseph's fortunes were incredibly reversed. He was now in a position to be God's instrument for saving the children of Israel.

*Did Joseph earn his reward through his faithfulness?*

P. H. H.

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# Transformed by Affliction

As the caravan journeyed southward toward the borders of Canaan, the boy could discern in the distance the hills among which lay his father's tents. Bitterly he wept at the thought of that loving father in his loneliness and affliction. Again the scene at Dothan came up before him. He saw his angry brothers and felt their fierce glances bent upon him. The stinging, insulting words that had met his agonized entreaties were ringing in his ears. With a trembling heart he looked forward to the future. What a change in situation—from the tenderly cherished son to the despised and helpless slave! Alone and friendless, what would be his lot in the strange land to which he going? For a time Joseph gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror. . . .

Then his thoughts turned to his father's God. In his childhood he had been taught to love and fear Him. Often in his father's tent he had listened to the story of the vision that Jacob saw as he fled from his home an exile and a fugitive. He had been told of the Lord's promises to Jacob, and how they had been fulfilled—how, in hour of need, the angels of God had come to instruct, comfort, and protect him. And he had learned of the love of God in providing for men a Redeemer. Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile.

His soul thrilled with the high resolve to prove himself true to God—under all circumstances to act as became a subject of the King of heaven. He would serve the Lord with undivided heart; he would meet the trials of his lot with fortitude and perform every duty with fidelity. One day's experience had been the turning point in Joseph's life. Its terrible calamity had transformed him from a petted child to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed. . . .

But Joseph's faith and integrity were to be tested by fiery trials. His master's wife endeavored to entice the young man to transgress the law of God. 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? With inexpressible anxiety, angels looked upon the scene.

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. Under the inspecting eye of God and holy angels many take liberties of which they would not be guilty in the presence of their fellow men, but Joseph's first thought was of God. "How . . . can I do

## TESTIMON

Key text:  
Romans 5:3-5

**"Terrible calamity had transformed him from a petted child to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed."**

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this great wickedness, and sin against God?" he said.

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. . . .

Joseph suffered for his integrity, for his tempter revenged herself by accusing him of a foul crime, and causing him to be thrust into prison. Had Potiphar believed his wife's charge against Joseph, the young Hebrew would have lost his life; but the modesty and uprightness that had uniformly characterized his conduct were proof of his innocence; and yet, to save the reputation of his master's house, he was abandoned to disgrace and bondage.

At the first Joseph was treated with great severity by his jailers. The psalmist says, "His feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in chains of iron: until the time that his word came to pass; the word of the Lord tried him." Psalm 105:18, 19, R.V. But Joseph's real character shines out, even in the darkness of that dungeon. He held fast his faith and patience; his years of faithful service had been most cruelly repaid, yet this did not render him morose or distrustful. He had the peace that comes from conscious innocence, and he trusted his case with God. He did not brood upon his own wrongs, but forgot his sorrow in trying to lighten the sorrows of others. He found a work to do, even in the prison. God was preparing him in the school of affliction for greater usefulness, and he did not refuse the needful discipline. In the prison, witnessing the results of oppression and tyranny and the effects of crime, he learned lessons of justice, sympathy, and mercy, that prepared him to exercise power with wisdom and compassion. . . .

An upright character is of greater worth than the gold of Ophir. Without it none can rise to an honorable eminence. But character is not inherited. It cannot be bought. Moral excellence and fine mental qualities are not the result of accident. The most precious gifts are of no value unless they are improved. The formation of a noble character is the work of a lifetime and must be the result of diligent and persevering effort. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them.

**"He had the peace that comes from conscious innocence, and he trusted his case with God."**

# A Tale of Two Brothers

by Beatrice S. Neall

Two stories, unrelated in time or location, appear side by side in Genesis.<sup>1</sup> Why? Because they portray two brothers reacting in opposite ways to seduction. Judah's failure is a dark foil that heightens the luster of Joseph's triumph.

Judah's problem started when as a boy he made friends with the local Canaanites and married one of them, contrary to God's plan (Gen. 24:3; 28:1, 2), at the incredible age of 13.<sup>2</sup> He quickly fathered three sons who were demoralized by Canaanite society. Then, in a short span, he lost his wife and two sons, being left with the youngest plus a widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar. She, desperate for children, seduced her own father-in-law. He, still young and sexually deprived, and anticipating the merriment of sheep-shearing time, was caught with his defenses down.<sup>3</sup>

In his moral fall, Judah revealed a strange mixture of ethical decency and deformity. First, he willingly accepted the advances of a supposed harlot. Secondly, he showed great scruples in the attempt to pay for her services. Thirdly, when he learned that Tamar was pregnant, he accused her of harlotry and commanded her to be burnt (perhaps branded as a prostitute<sup>4</sup>)—an outrageous demonstration of the double standard! Lastly, when Tamar produces his belongings to expose him as the father, he humbly took the blame on himself, declaring her to be more righteous than he.<sup>5</sup> From then on he appears to have lived a moral, even celibate life.<sup>6</sup>

When Joseph was faced with seduction in the house of Potiphar, he was also young, sexually deprived, and apparently vulnerable. But his moral principles were consistent and firm. He lived consciously in the presence of God (every time he spoke he mentioned God), and was transparent in his dealings with people. He immediately thought of his master's trust in him, his temptress's obligation to her husband, and above all, his commitment to God. When Potiphar's wife produced his belongings as evidence against him, he made no attempt to defend himself or expose her. He suffered in silence, letting his reputation and his God be his defense.

Two men, young and vulnerable, come under attack by designing women. Judah falls, but admits his guilt and reforms. Joseph does not fall. Judah, by the forgiving grace of God is honored: his sin sires the Savior from sin (Matt. 1:1, 3). Joseph, through the empowering grace of God, avoids sin and is elevated to high honor in the world. God is able to mend broken lives and use them for his glory. But the untarnished life of Joseph shines in greater glory.

## REACT

1. What does Joseph's example suggest about successfully handling sexual temptation today?

2. Why do you think Tamar was one of only four women cited in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (see Matt. 1:1-15)?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Genesis 39:9

**"Judah's failure is a dark foil that heightens the luster of Joseph's triumph."**

1. Chapters 38 and 39.

2. See *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 434, for a discussion of the chronology.

3. *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 218, 219.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

5. Because, according to the laws of levirate marriage, Judah should have given her Shelah as a husband.

6. Scripture records no other wife or children for him, and he had no more relations with Tamar (Gen. 38:26).

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# Weapons of Love

by Kathy Bollinger

## HOW TO Key text: Galatians 5:22, 23

When the tree house was first built in the sprawling oak tree, it promised to be an ever-present hideout for my two young sons. I watched with pride as the older helped the younger up the rough wooden steps. The older son's searching eyes, while enjoying the world from on high, constantly darted back and forth to the younger's less confident steps. I marveled at their relationship of love.

But then the neighbors came. With the two fun-loving characters from across the pasture, my boys were having a great time in their hideout. That's when I noticed the changed relationship. No longer was the older son's concern on the safety of the younger. The younger, in fact, seemed to be forgotten in the fun. The bigger boys were performing daring tricks in which a small child could not participate. Dejected, he left the melee and came home. Their relationship had changed.

The relationships in this week's lesson between Jacob, Joseph, and his brothers were badly damaged by jealousy, anger, arrogance, deception, and poor judgment. How can we deal with destructive relationships and develop helping ones? Here are some questions to think about.

1. Could it be that being trustworthy as a leader doesn't depend on being rigidly consistent, but being dependably real?

2. Is it possible to be strong enough as a person to be separate from another? Can I be a steady respecter of my own feeling and needs as well as his?

3. Am I able to accept a person as he presents himself to me? Can I receive him as he is? Or can I only receive him conditionally, accepting of some aspects of his feelings and silently or openly disapproving of other aspects?

As the human beings that we are, we often spend our lifetimes worrying about our relationships to others. Because human nature is fickle, we feel in limbo trying to decide how to treat someone or respond to the way we've been treated.

What a blessing it is to know that God is always watching us with love and concern. Really loving people is not easy for a human. It takes a huge amount of power because sometimes the people we love tend to cause us pain. This is why we constantly need to be filled with the Spirit of Christ. The loving fruit of the Spirit includes "joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22, 23). These are the weapons of love. Under Christ's direction these weapons enable us to accept and love people even after they have hurt us. While staying close to God we can receive that ability to love because He first loved us.

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# An Example for the Hurting

by Linda M. Sprengel

Adultery, divorce, remarriage, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, neglect, permissiveness, and communication breakdown are all common family diseases today. And families in the church are by no means exempt. The modern psychological treatment of talk-it-out-and-pass-the-buck leaves many participants still hurting, still hating, still hopeless, yet with plenty of new-found excuses to fail. Surely this isn't God's solution to pain. He wants the ones hurting to forgive, to go on with life, and to sin no more. He offers the grace to succeed.

Those who are hurting ought to examine the life of Joseph. He left an unhealthy yet religious family background only to enter an even less wholesome household, pagan at that! However, the fame of his character and success has sparkled for thousands of years.

His father's relationships with not only two wives, Rachel and Leah, but also two concubines, Bilah and Zilpah, led to divided affections and furnished a sad example of bickering and strife. Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph created a hatred in the jealous older brothers. Joseph, of course, did nothing to win their affections when he gave his father bad reports about them and, perhaps naively, revealed to them his apparently egotistical dreams. The brothers' resentment grew to murderous proportions. Eventually, they sold him into slavery, barely sparing his life.

Joseph could have harbored hateful, bitter revenge. But he did neither. Only at first did he give in to "uncontrolled grief and terror. . . [But] then his thoughts turned to his father's God. . . He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord."<sup>1</sup> Joseph turned his eyes away from himself and the bitterness of his lot when he placed his future in God's care. He resolved to prove himself a faithful servant and child of the King.

The decision to allow God to control our destinies is crucial for healing. As we acknowledge his lordship in our lives, God begins to cleanse our damaged emotions and reshape our deformed characters. Our self-worth grows as we realize his all-encompassing love. We receive the strength and grace needed to place the principle of love above our emotions when relating to others—especially to those who hurt us. We release our felt need for revenge and feel secure enough to forgive. We find our pain makes us sensitive to the hurts of others and we forget self as we seek to serve.

A lifestyle of others-centeredness puts personal pain into perspective; restoration is accomplished. This means of dealing with a background of hurt brings God's followers triumph over pain and glorifies the Healer. Joseph overcame; so may we.

## REACT

Will God do for anyone who trusts him what he did for Joseph?

**OPINION**  
**Key text:**  
**Psalm 16:5, 11**

**"The decision to allow God to control our destinies is crucial for healing."**

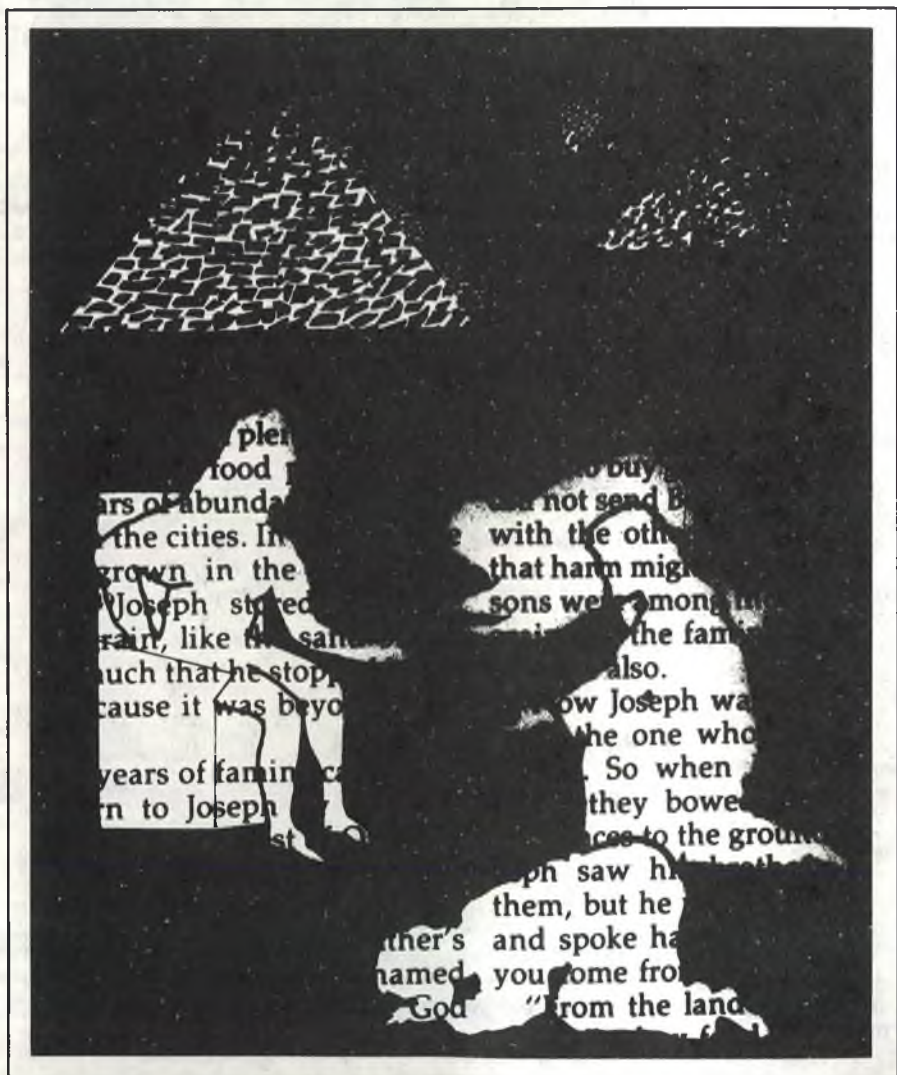
<sup>1</sup> *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213, 214.

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# JOSEPH: AN EPIC OF DESTINY, II

"But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Genesis 45:7, NIV).





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# The Family Line

by Linda Dick

Joseph folded his arms and tried to look sternly at the men before him, their familiar faces baked brick brown by the desert sun of their long journey to Egypt. But a tear creeping down his nose tickled him and he had to turn away to hide his smile.

Behind him, the men were silent, but he could imagine the bewilderment on their faces, faces he knew so well even after so many years. "And they haven't the faintest idea who I am," he thought. He wanted to laugh with joy. His father still lived. And Benjamin!

It was all so wonderful, the way the pieces of the puzzle he had been living were at last fitting together. Ages ago now—the pit, the traders, Potiphar and his wife, the prison, the pharaoh's dreams. And even longer ago, the strange dreams of the bowing sheaves. From pit to prison to prince, a strange and marvelous maze he had been led through.

He whisked the tears from his face and turned to face the brothers again. Reuben was whispering in Judah's ear. He snapped to attention at the sight of Joseph's eyes on him. The beard on Reuben's chest softened to gray at his temples now, and the lines around his eyes held the same cheerful wisdom Joseph remembered in Jacob's face. Judah, too, had aged, his bristly black brows turned down sternly

over his snapping black eyes.

"Just like Father's," Joseph thought fondly. In Issachar and Zebulon he could see Jacob's firm chin and craggy nose, gentled by the green eyes of Leah. He looked again at Reuben. "The image of his grandfather, Isaac," the women had always said. And which of the brothers drew resemblance to great-grandfather Abraham, he wondered.

"We are all brothers, the sons of one man," they had told him through the interpreter. Men of one God Joseph mentally continued, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And Joseph.

Joseph looked down at himself—his brilliant robes and soft sandals. How different he must look than his brothers in their plain tunics and rough beards.

"But you are my brothers," he thought, the tears threatening again. "It was not you that sent me hither, but God. God sent me here before you, to preserve lives, your lives. Soon I can reveal to you this mystery you have just opened before me. You will tell it to my father and to your own children who will tell it in years to come to their children. You will bring your families here and I, whom God has made lord of all Egypt, shall be able to nourish you. I cannot tell you yet, but soon. . . ."

He smiled at the thought.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Genesis  
41:41 to 50:26

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# To Preserve a Remnant

## LOGOS

**Theme:** A divine purpose now clearly emerges from the drama of Joseph's special destiny: His power in Egypt enables the survival of the chosen family.

### 1. Joseph, the Governor (read Gen. 41:41-57)

*"So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt' "* (41:41, NIV). At the youthful age of thirty, Joseph became second in command of Egypt. When taking all the variables into account, this feat seems unbelievable—of miracle status. Consider that he was a slave, a prisoner, a youth, and an alien. Yet in spite of these obstacles, against all odds, Joseph aspired even beyond his boyhood dreams. The one constant in his life, which counterbalanced all the disadvantages was his close relationship with God, whom he trusted implicitly in his plans for his life. Joseph began the task of preparing for the upcoming famine, by seemingly cornering the world's grain market for the next seven years.

*We witness Joseph functioning successfully in the midst of the political scene of Egypt—put there by God's design. Does Joseph model, to any extent, a Christian's political involvement today?*

### 2. Joseph and His Brothers (read Gen. 42-45)

As famine sweeps across the land, the scene shifts from the plenty of Egypt to the barrenness of the land of Abraham. Jacob announces to his sons, *"I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die"* (42:2, NIV). The stage is now set for the impending confrontation between Joseph and his brothers. The conflict one might expect, taking into account the treatment Joseph received at the hands of his brothers, never materializes. Instead we witness the brothers *"with their faces to the ground . . ."*, reminiscent of Joseph's boyhood dreams. Joseph hides his true identity and conducts a series of tests to determine his brothers' true characters. Joseph begins by accusing them of being spies. By holding one of the brothers, Simeon, in custody, he is able to force them to return with their youngest brother Benjamin to prove their authenticity. With this new development, the brothers are haunted by past events which seem to be responsible for the tragedy they are experiencing. *"Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us"* (42:21, NIV).

As food runs out the brothers of Joseph return to Egypt with the youngest brother Benjamin. Joseph, on their first journey, had replaced the silver they had paid in their sacks of grain. For this reason the brothers, loaded with "gifts and double the amount of silver," approach Egypt in apprehension and fear. We begin to notice a change in the characters of the brothers—they are honest,

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attempting to return the silver and make any amends that might be necessary.

After a feast, Joseph applies the final test with his silver divination cup. Joseph has his steward place it in Benjamin's sack of grain. The brothers begin their journey home and with each step they gain a sense of relief to have left safely with their father's beloved Benjamin. However they do not travel far before they are overtaken by Joseph's steward. He has each son's sack opened and investigated, from oldest to youngest to heighten the suspense. When the silver cup is found in Benjamin's sack, the steward assures the rest that only the guilty one, Benjamin, will be made a slave and the rest can return safely home. The brothers react by tearing their clothes in grief and returning to the city to plead for Benjamin's freedom. Judah, who had instigated the sale of Joseph as a slave years before, pleads for the release of Benjamin and offers himself as a slave in Benjamin's stead.

At this point Joseph finally acknowledges the true repentance and changed characters of his brothers and reveals his identity to them. He completely forgives them for their rough treatment of him in the past and shows them how God in his wisdom had planned long before to keep his promise ". . . to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (45:7, NIV). This was God's deliverance of Abraham's seed from famine. We now get a better picture of Joseph's life in respect to the entirety of God's plan. Joseph urges his family, by God's direction, to come down to Egypt and live out the famine in the land of plenty.

*Do you think Joseph's tests were fair or even necessary?*

### 3. The Genesis Epic Concludes (read Gen. 46-50)

Jacob moves to Egypt by God's command and it is here in a strange land that his life comes to an end. As he senses his life drawing to a close, he calls his sons together to bless each one. In his blessing on Judah, Jacob refers to the hope of the messianic king who will be born to Judah's descendants. "*The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his*" (49:10, NIV). It is interesting to note that not all sons received a glowing and promising blessing regarding the future from Jacob.

After Jacob's death, the brothers' fears are rekindled that Joseph may now distribute retribution. However Joseph declares that ". . . God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (50:24, NIV). This promise was instilled into the hearts and minds of Joseph's descendants and their hope reached fruition with the Exodus.

P. H. H.



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# An Illustration of Christ

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
alm 105:16-22

From the depths of slavery and prison, Joseph had risen to a position of near absolute power in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. It was at this pinnacle of success and power that Joseph ran into his brothers again, the same ones who had destroyed the life he had once known and cherished by the tents of his father. At that moment revenge could have been his. He had every reason, and the power, to carry it out. Yet, he forgave. Joseph reached out in love and compassion to his brothers.

As we read through the story of Joseph we witness continually his love and faith in God regardless of his situation in life. Ellen White points out how Joseph's life represented Christ's life.

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

**"Their own  
course was  
overruled by  
God to bring  
about the very  
event that they  
designed to  
hinder."**

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

"As Joseph was sold to the heathen by his own brothers, so Christ was sold to His bitterest enemies by one of His disciples. Joseph was falsely accused and thrust into prison because of his virtue; so Christ was despised and rejected because His righteous, self-denying life was a rebuke to sin; and though guilty of no wrong, He was condemned upon the testimony of false witnesses. And Joseph's patience and meekness under injustice and oppression, his ready forgiveness and noble benevolence toward his unnatural brothers, represent the Saviour's uncomplaining endurance of the malice and abuse of wicked men, and His forgiveness, not only of His murderers, but of all who have come to Him confessing their sins and seeking pardon."<sup>1</sup>

P. H. H.

*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 239, 240.

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# “Not You ... But God”

by Lyndon McDowell

“It was not you . . . but God.” “You sold me . . . God sent me” (Genesis 45:8, 5). This approach to life’s injustices was Joseph’s flag of faith.

One of the most common causes of family and church disaffection is man-made hurt. Visit ten non-attending, drifting church members and possibly nine will recount how the church, the college, the pastor, or the elder did something or said something that hurt. The hurts festered, the life soured, and faith drained away. Apostasy had found a *raison d’etre*.

Joseph had an effective defense against this temptation: “not you . . . but God.” In everything that happened he saw the hand of God shaping and disciplining his life—“You sold me . . . God sent me.”

The Scriptures everywhere declare God’s concern for man: “I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.” “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Psalm 91:2, 11). “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6). This was the same source of Joseph’s strength. He believed in God’s concern for him personally.

Belief in God’s personal direction in his life made it easier for him to forgive, but Joseph’s forgiveness was not a wimpish piousness. His brothers had done a terrible wrong—he would have to try them before he could trust them. But even the testing process that he used was an expression of his concern for them and for his father. Notice what he did.

Simeon had taken the lead role in the treachery against Joseph,<sup>1</sup> hence Simeon was bound as a surety for the brothers’ return with Benjamin. Were the brothers still jealous of Rachel’s children? Benjamin’s portion at the palace meal was five times as much as theirs, but the brothers only marveled. There were no envious remarks. Were they concerned about their younger brother’s relationship to their father? The cup was placed in Benjamin’s sack and when he was accused, their freedom was offered in exchange for Benjamin’s bondage.

No resentment colored Joseph’s testing process. No bitterness motivated this attitude. “Not you . . . but God,” was the basis of his approach to them and they, in turn, passed the test. The brothers had genuinely repented of their deed. “Tested by adversity, they were shown to be unselfish, true to one another, devoted to their father, and, themselves middle-aged men, subject to his authority.”<sup>2</sup> They even offered their lives in exchange for the life of Benjamin.

No man or company of men, no power on earth can penetrate the encircling arms of God’s protecting grace without his permission. What God allows, he will use for our good if we maintain our faith in him. Even when people misuse us, an attitude of “not you . . . but God” makes possible a life of faith and forgiveness.

This attitude does not deny us the right to deal with transgres-

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Genesis 45:5-11

“Joseph’s forgiveness was not a wimpish piousness.”

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sions against us, but it does preclude festering resentment. The actions of men provide no excuse for apostasy. God might simply be testing our metal and preparing us for higher service. What an eternal loss can be ours if we stumble over God's stepping stones!

Twenty years had passed since the brothers returned from Dothan with the bloodstained cloak and a fabricated story. For twenty years Jacob had grieved over the death of Joseph, his favorite son. What a humiliating confession they had to make on their second return from Egypt. "Joseph is not dead. We sold him. He is ruler of all Egypt."

In the abridged edition of the lives of the patriarchs that is given in the Old Testament it sometimes seems that their questions were quickly answered and that theophanies were frequent. This was not so. There were beacon lights graciously given, but there were also days of darkness and inexplicable experiences. There were days when, like Jacob, they cried out ". . . all these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36). But by faith they held on and at the evening of life they were able to say with joy: "God . . . has been my shepherd all my life, to this day" (Gen. 48:15).

### REACT

1. If nothing can happen to us that God does not permit, does that mean that everything that happens to us is God's will?
2. Should we forgive those who wrong us unconditionally? What does Joseph's example suggest?

The actions of men provide no excuse for apostasy."

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*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 226.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 225.



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# How to Forgive Much

It was a small incident, but one I have never forgotten, though it happened nearly twenty years ago. The event is so etched in my mind that I can close my eyes and still see the milk jug, the box of Rice Crispies, and the green, porcelain jam jar sitting on the table.

As I remember, it was a Sabbath morning breakfast, a special time in our home when we made a departure from the detestable routine of hot porridge to the snappy, crackling, popping delights of Rice Crispies topped off with cream from the college dairy, and stewed guavas from our own trees. We never bought the cream separately as modernization and homogenization were still years away from the school farm. So we just took our cream off the top of the milk.

This particular Sabbath morning the family was involved in a lively and happy discussion, so much so that we failed to notice that my sister had poured off her portion of the cream and was now slyly stirring the remaining cream into the milk, all the time looking as innocent as an angel of light—that is until we noticed her practical joke. The rest of us, were not amused, myself in particular. Now my cereal would have to snap, pop and crackle to the tune of plain milk. "Sharon," I vowed, "I will never forgive you!" Quite a statement coming from three or four year old lips! But fortunately, the promise was never fulfilled and the memory serves only to bring smiles.

If Joseph had made a similar vow trudging in chains behind a stinking, Ishmaelite camel it could be more readily understood. After all, selling your own blood kin into the horrors of slavery does stretch the limits of forgiveness. But if Joseph ever made such a vow, he never kept it. Granted, being made second in command over all of Egypt perhaps made forgiving a little easier, but nowhere is there any record of any malice Joseph might understandably have had. Though after many years of hard work and imprisonment, he did become very successful, his brothers had robbed him of association with family, his own kind and those who held similar beliefs to his. And ruler of Egypt or not, this separation could not have been easy. Yet even when his brothers came in all their vulnerability to buy food there is no hint of revenge in his actions toward them.

How is this possible? How, after such long years of pain, when at last the mystical, wishful dreams of seeing those who have done the wrong bow in open weakness are fulfilled, how when revenge is all too easy, does one turn, forget the wrongs and forgive? Here the record does not explicitly say. Yet the Joseph story and others like it in the Bible do illustrate that no matter the magnitude of the wrong, forgiveness is possible. And when these stories are viewed through the prism of Calvary, it becomes clear that forgiveness can be given since we too have been forgiven for so much.

E. R. M.

**HOW TO**

**Key text:**  
**Luke 7:47**

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# The Best Place

by Susan Cowin

## OPINION

Key text:

Hebrews 13:5

It's not a common topic, but have you ever talked about the worst year of your life? It might be for some the worst semester or worst summer or worst month. Nevertheless, you feel pain just remembering it. You had a hard time coping. You may even resent God allowing you to have suffered so.

A scenic Hallmark poster declares the truth that "Happiness is not a goal to be reached, but something to be enjoyed as you journey." We are to be content, wherever. During these worst periods of our lives we should have realized that if we were where God wanted us, it was the *best* place for us. That's hard to take when it's you that hurts, but think about it.

God has ever been trying to help man see that being with him brings much deeper peace than all the riches ever gained. The things you learn in the tough situations become a part of you, strengthening your character. But, many times when things get hard to bear, people question God's leading and may lose faith rather than gain it.

Joseph was different. He learned to beat discouragement at its first entrance to his mind. In a short period of time Joseph had to turn from a child to a man, and this he did because of the fact that he decided to follow God completely, no matter what his future in Egypt. He accepted his good and ill fortunes as all part of God's plan. He wasn't one to fret over trials. God wanted him there and it was the best place for him.

How could anyone so young have had such a complete faith in God's plan for his life? I have some fine Christian friends and together we seek God and his will for us. But we get discouraged, we dull to his leading (even avoid it at times!) and we are slow to see how past trials have brought present joys. Joseph let his mind dwell on God and communed with him, a lesson for my friends and me.

Paul says "rejoice evermore . . . in everything give thanks . . ." (1 Thess. 5:16, 18). If you're where God has designated, then rejoice! It's the best place for you.

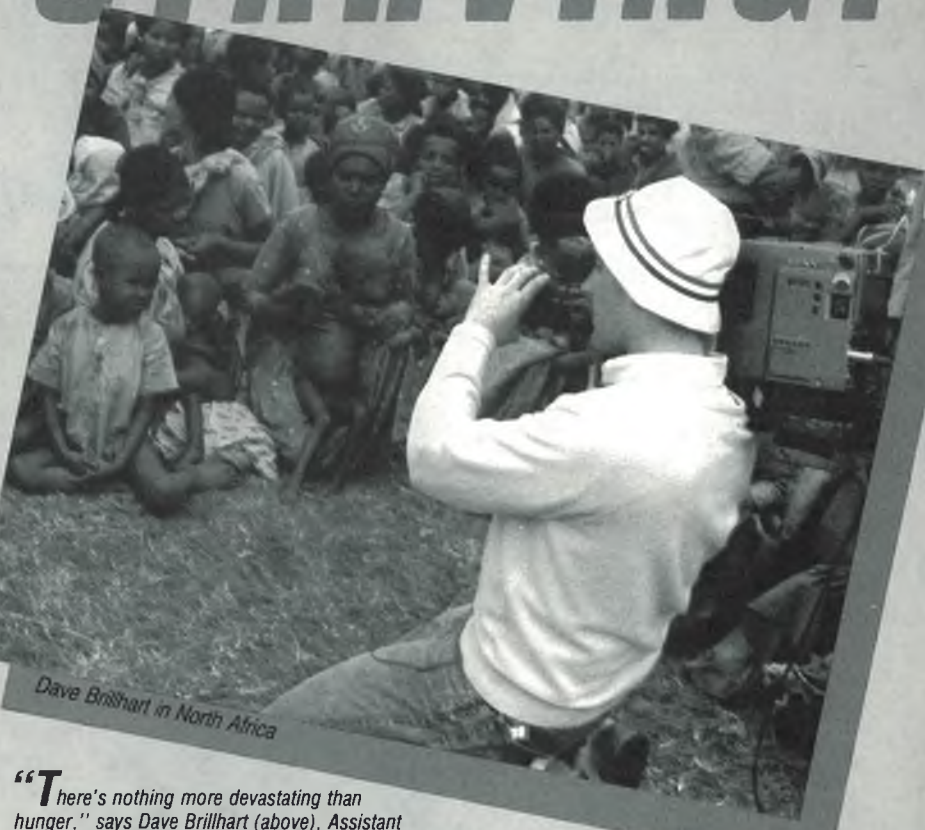
## REACT

Can you identify discouraging periods of your life out of which God brought unexpected good?

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Susan Cowin is an English and music education major at Union College.

# STARVING!



Dave Brillhart in North Africa

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