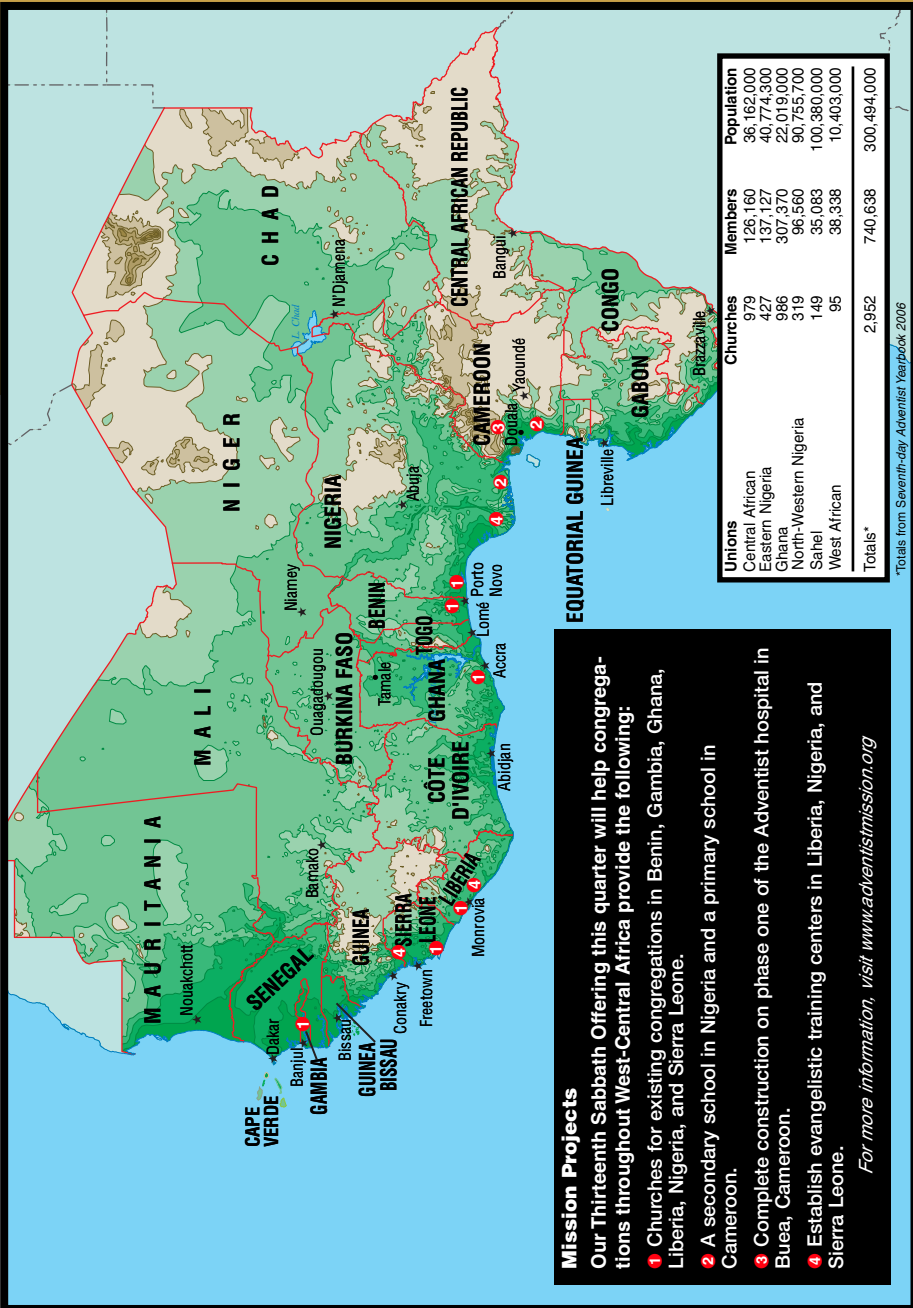


West-Central Africa

DIVISION

ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
July • Aug • Sept 2007



Mission Projects
Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help congregations throughout West-Central Africa provide the following:

- 1 Churches for existing congregations in Benin, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.
- 2 A secondary school in Nigeria and a primary school in Cameroon.
- 3 Complete construction on phase one of the Adventist hospital in Buea, Cameroon.
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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE: LESSONS FROM OLD TESTAMENT COUPLES July • Aug • Sept 2007

For Better or for Worse:

Lessons From Old Testament Couples



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For Better or for Worse:

Marriage was meant to be one of the most uplifting and edifying aspects of human existence.

In his will, German poet Heinrich Heine offered his estate to the man who married his widow. The reason, he said, was that this way he'd be sure that there would be at least one person who mourned his death.

Of all the devastating effects of sin, one of the worst has to be what it has done to marriage. From what we can gather from Scripture (and the wonderful insights from the Spirit of Prophecy), marriage was meant to be one of the most uplifting and edifying aspects of human existence. It was designed to reveal our humanity in ways that nothing else could. As if God, after the earth came forth from His creative word, hadn't already done enough for the race. In His love for us He gave us more, perhaps what was to be even the best blessing of all—marriage.

Of course, from the first bite of the forbidden fruit, things went from bad to worse. In the Bible account, right after the first couple sinned, the first thing we see is how sin immediately impacted their relationship. "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (*Gen. 3:7*). Nothing between men and women, husbands and wives, has been the same ever since.

What should have been a source of joy, freedom, and fulfillment has become, too often, a source of misery, oppression, and despair. Not always (indeed, in many cases marriages are wonderful expressions of spiritual and physical unity that helps complete a human being), but still far too often.

This quarter we're going to look at married couples in the Old Testament, not so much as a study on the principles of marriage but rather to use married couples (though in many cases the marriages were composed of more than "couples") as a starting point to learn various lessons—about faith, works, obedience, hope, trust, love, and

Lessons From Old Testament Couples

a host of other aspects of what it means to be a follower of the Lord in a fallen world.

It makes good sense to use marriage as a starting point, simply because marriage is so fundamental to human existence. This relationship forms the foundation of the family, and it's out of the family that (for the most part) we propagate ourselves. Also, considering how often marriage is used in the Bible as a symbol for various spiritual truths, it seems to be a good starting point.

Of course, not everyone is married; many of the great Bible characters—Daniel, John the Baptist, and even Jesus—weren't (maybe we ought to do a quarter on the singles in the Bible!). Nevertheless, the principles we can learn from studying these marriages often can be applied to various aspects of our lives, whether married or not.

Thus, for the next few months as we explore the relationships of various couples—Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Ruth and Boaz, even Ahab and Jezebel, and more—we'll seek to mine from the Word of God practical truths that we can apply to our daily relationships with one another and with the Lord, who says to His people: “For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee” (*Isa. 62:5*).

Our two authors this quarter have been happily married for many years. Gordon Christo is director of collegiate education of the Southern Asia Division; his wife, Rosenita, works in the division office. They have two grown children.

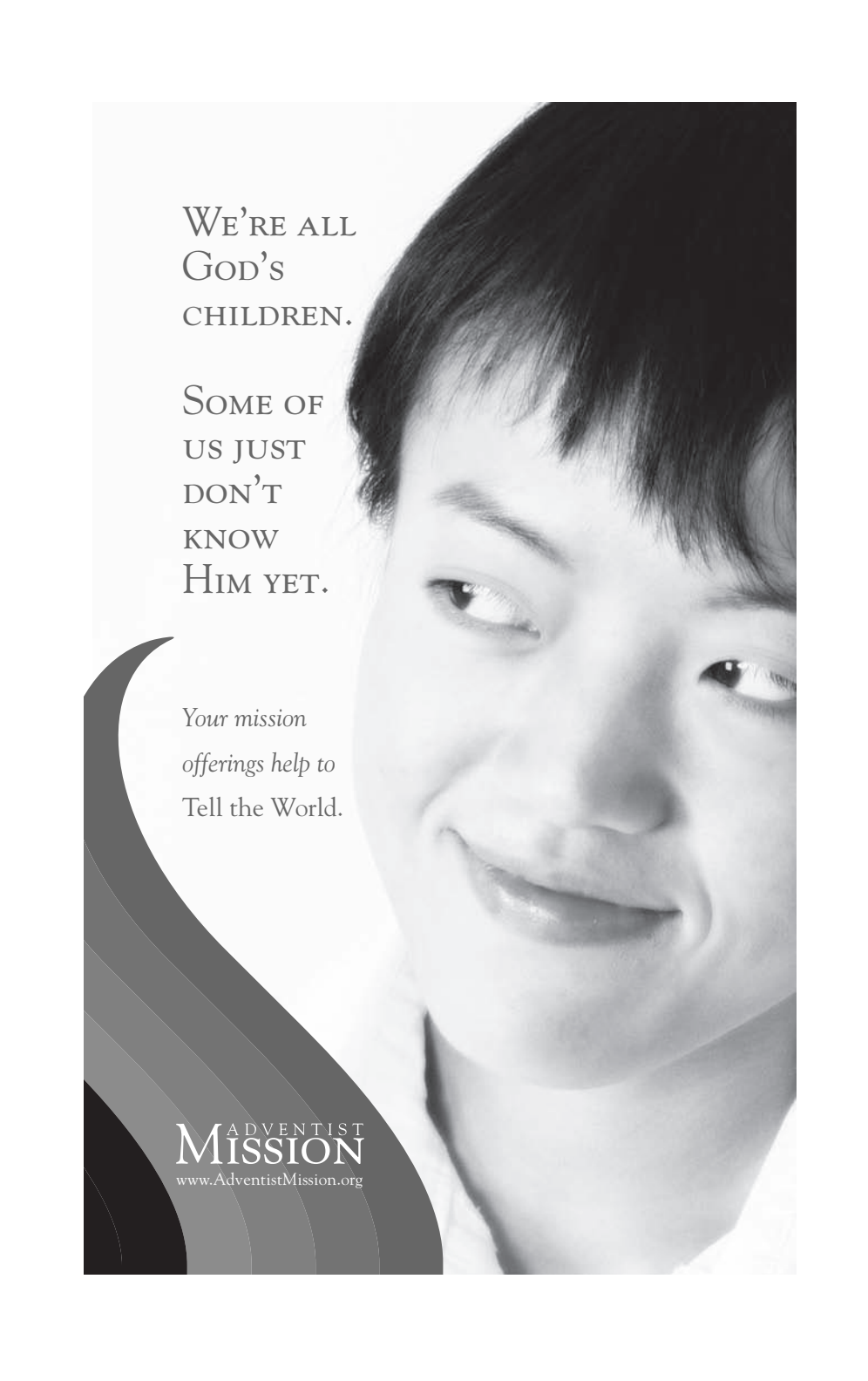
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Adam *and* Eve: The Intended Ideal



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26, 2:18–3:16.*

Memory Text: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (*Genesis 2:24, NIV*).

The story of Adam and Eve has a beautiful beginning but a sad ending. God had provided for them everything good. They were a handsome groom and a pretty bride, untainted with any blemish in their characters or body. They lived in a beautiful garden home with no need to worry about anything. To top it all, God even gave them the prospect of everlasting life. The beginning of their marriage was better than that of any fairy tale.

However, the ending was as far as possible from the fairy-tale ending of “living happily ever after.” The story ends with Adam and Eve losing it all—for themselves and for all other couples and individuals to follow. It’s a powerful example of the cost of sin. We should learn well from this story about what deviation from the will of God brings.

The Week at a Glance: Adam and Eve, as originally created, bore the express image of their Maker. What does that mean? Even more so, what happened when that image was defiled by sin? What can we learn from the sad story of their fall?

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

The Image of God

“So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (*Gen. 1:27, NKJV*).

The meaning of what constitutes the “image of God” can be understood partly through the clarifying statement that follows in the text—“*male and female He created them.*” Male and female together reflect the image of God. One gender complements the other and is incomplete by itself. Male and female human beings were not meant to live separately but to seek the other naturally. This combination of male and female is necessary for the preservation of society and the continuity of human history.

Many have associated God with solely the masculine gender. Though the Hebrew word for God has a masculine plural ending and takes masculine forms of the verb, the Bible also includes feminine imagery and qualities for God.

What feminine images for the attributes of God are used here? *Deut. 32:11; Isa. 49:15, 16; 66:12, 13; Hos. 13:8; Matt. 23:37.*

In support of this complementary nature of the genders is the idea of the plurality in God. The pronoun used for God is in the plural: “‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness’” (*Gen. 1:26, NIV*).

How might the plurality of the Godhead reflect the idea of man and woman together reflecting the image of God?

Plurality in the Godhead is necessary because God is love. In order for love to exist, there must be someone to love and someone to be loved. Male and female in their partnership reflect this plurality. Like God, it is natural for man and woman to be united in love. Love marks a basic human relationship. Humans live to love and are not complete unless they do so, whether or not that love is expressed in a marriage relationship. Single people can express love in other ways. After all, Jesus was single.

How does the love expressed to us through the death of Jesus (*John 15:13*) help us better understand what love is really about?

A Suitable Helper

Why did the Lord make a wife for Adam? *Gen. 2:18.*

Why was it not good for Adam to be “alone”? After all, didn’t he have the companionship of the animals, and even God Himself?

Genesis 2:18–22 suggests that even though God observed the need to create a companion for the man, He delayed creating the woman till after all the animals were named. As we read the narrative, we feel with Adam his increasing awareness of being alone. He could not help noticing that as God brought animals and birds before him to be named, they came in pairs. He gave the same name to the pair, but he had to observe that one was male and one female. They provided companionship for each other in a way that no other animal or bird could. In contrast, for him “no suitable helper was found” (*Gen. 2:20, NIV*). His aloneness was glaring.

As God had created day by day, He was able to remark at the end of the day, when He reviewed His work, that it was “good.” He also uses the same word in the context of Adam, only in a different way. He says that it is not “good” that the man was alone.

How did God describe the wife He was about to make for Adam? *Gen. 2:18.*

God did not comment that He would make merely a helper to or for Adam but one to complement him. The Hebrew literally means “like his opposite.” His partner was not there just to be a helper—to prepare the food, to bear children, or even to tend the garden. Eve was to be his complement—his opposite, a partner in the true sense of the term. Her value is for the person she is. Also, the idea of a helper hardly denotes a person of lesser quality, not when the Bible often refers to God as One who helps humankind (*see Pss. 30:10, 54:4, 121:2, Heb. 13:6*).

Think about someone you know now who might be suffering from loneliness. How much of yourself are you willing to give up in order to help?

Husband and Wife

In Genesis 2:23 Adam's initial feeling upon seeing Eve was not romance but relief. In Hebrew his first word can be translated variously as "now," or "this time," but the translation that fits best is "At last!" Now, at last, here was a living being with whom he could truly identify. She was not just his counterpart; being made from his rib, she was a literal part of him. Matthew Henry said that the woman was "not made out of his head to top 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."

Read 1 Corinthians 11:11, 12. What important point about unity and togetherness that should exist between husband and wife is Paul making here?

Read Genesis 2:24. What change in allegiance and priorities is demanded by this text?

The text is not requiring one to leave the parents' home and join the spouse's family home, as is done in some societies. The spirit of the text here requires both husband and wife to change their priorities. No longer do parents have first claim. This is serious in cultures such as in the Old Testament, where children were to honor their parents throughout their lives. This, of course, should continue today, but after marriage, loyalty is to the spouse over the parents.

Commenting on Genesis 2:24, Jesus declared that husband and wife "are no longer two, but one" (*Matt. 19:6, NIV*). Husband and wife are to be united, socially, emotionally, and spiritually, even as the Trinity, though Three, is One. This is one way in which husband and wife reflect the "image of God."

If you are married, what things can you do, what attitudes do you need to change, in order to be more closely united with your spouse? If you're not married, what changes do you need to make in order to have better and closer relationships with the people around you?

Two Are Better Than One

Read Genesis 3:1–6. Several elements in the narrative suggest that Eve was alone when she succumbed to the temptation. (1) The serpent addresses only the woman. (2) Adam seems absent and is not mentioned till Eve gives him the fruit. (3) Adam is cursed only for listening to his wife and not for listening to the serpent.

Several versions of the Bible and certain commentaries suggest that Adam was with Eve at the time she was tempted (*Gen. 3:6*). The Hebrew has several words that may be translated “with.” Two important ones are *etzel* and *im*. The latter is used in this passage.

Etzel is the preposition that is used to denote location beside or next to something. (See *Gen. 39:15, 18*.) By contrast, *im* denotes relationship. “Immanuel” in Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8, 10 begins with the preposition *im* and means “God with us.” It is a relational position and not geographical. Genesis 3:6 therefore does not strictly demand that we see Adam positioned beside Eve when she is tempted. Adam used the same preposition in Genesis 3:12 to remind God about the woman He had put with him. It is a relational “with.” Had he been with her, she might not have succumbed. “The angels had cautioned Eve to beware of separating herself from her husband while occupied in their daily labor in the garden; with him she would be in less danger from temptation than if she were alone.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 53.

Keeping in mind the context of today’s lesson, what’s the message for us in the following texts:

Prov. 11:14

Eccles. 4:9–11

James 5:16

How have you experienced the help, protection, and good advice of others? How willing are you to get, or even to give, help when needed? Bring to class an example of when the presence and/or help of others made a big difference for you.

The Curse on the Relationship

“Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (*Gen. 3:16, NIV*).

In one stroke Adam and Eve lost everything—innocence, rulership, immortality, Edenic home, and security. What they got in exchange was guilt, competition with beasts, expulsion, fear, struggle for existence, death, etc. A couple in a perfectly harmonious love relationship can bear all kinds of hardship together, but in addition to all these other losses they suffered the disruption of their ideal relationship.

Adam would develop a tendency to dominate, and this attitude would mar their relationship. God foresaw that some men would extend their leadership role to subjugation by force. This was not decreed by God. He didn't address Adam telling him what to do; He addressed Eve, telling her what would be a consequence of her sin. This is contrary to the original intention of God for husband-wife relationships.

Read 1 Timothy 2:11–14. What point is Paul making, and how does he tie this point to the Fall?

The Bible considers it to be the correct attitude for a woman to submit herself to her husband (*1 Pet. 3:1*). The illustration of Sarah obeying Abraham and calling him “master” is provided as an example of true subordination. Yet, wives are told not to give way to fear (*vs. 6, NIV*). Similarly, husbands are instructed to treat their wives with love and respect. Peter indicates that neglecting to do this “will hinder your prayers” (*vs. 7, NIV*). These are instructions for a post-Fall relationship.

If you have caused pain to your spouse (or anyone) through a mistake, how can you help that aggrieved person recover? You can't change the past; what can you do, however, to improve the future in regard to your relationships?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Eden Home a Pattern,” pp. 25–28, in *The Adventist Home*.

“In the creation God had made her [Eve] the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other. . . . Had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man’s abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter and made her life a burden.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 58, 59.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is it that in homes, societies, and organizations it seems best to have one who is first among equals—a leader, for better functioning? What are the advantages of such an arrangement? At the same time, what are the dangers?
- ❷ As a class, go over your responses to Wednesday’s lesson. What can you learn from each other? Also, how do you as a class help each other? Discuss how you could better use the advantages of a group to help individual members who are struggling with whatever issues they face.
- ❸ Though these lessons are in the context of marriage, what principles can we take from what we’ve learned and apply to other relationships?
- ❹ What does your church do to help women who are in abusive home situations? What more could, and should, you do?

Summary: The relationship of equality, mutual love, and respect between Adam and Eve was intended as the ideal for all couples. However, the ideal was marred by sin, and today conflicts plague marriages. We should strive to allow the Holy Spirit to re-create in us the original image of God.

Free!

by MARADONA MAGUBA

As a soldier in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I was sent to protect the local people in an area where heavy fighting had taken place. The people were holding evangelistic meetings, so I listened as I guarded them.

My unit was moved to another area before the evangelistic meetings ended. After a month of heavy fighting, I just wanted to die. I decided to go to church before I died, but I did not know of a church nearby. Then I heard someone broadcasting religious meetings. I followed the sound and found the Seventh-day Adventist church. Once more I heard the message of grace and the law.

When my unit was moved again, I found an Adventist church where I could worship. But my commander refused to let me attend church on Saturday. When I was caught sneaking to church, I was beaten.

I saw no way to worship in freedom, so I fled the military. I knew I could be sent to prison if they found me, so I hid among the Pygmy people, where I thought no one would look for me. But I was captured and taken back to camp. There soldiers put me into a deep hole I could not climb out of.

I am a mechanic, and one day they took me from the hole to repair their car. I fixed the car and ran away again. This time I went to the city where I had attended church. I found the pastor, who told me that soldiers were searching for me, but he wanted to help me.

I stayed with the pastor for two days. Then he took me to my former commander and arranged for my release from the military so I could work for the church. Praise God, the commander released me. I was a free man!

I drove the truck for the church and studied the Bible. A year later I was baptized into God's church. Today I am truly free—free from the military, free to serve the Lord.



MARADONA MAGUBA (left) shares his faith in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Abraham *and* Sarah: Faith Tested *and* Tried



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 12:2, 16:1–5, 22, James 2:20–26.*

Memory Text: “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise” (*Hebrews 11:11, NIV*).

By delaying the fulfillment of their promised child, God tested Abraham's and Sarah's faith. Many New Testament authors point to Abraham as the prime example of faith (*Romans 4 and Hebrews 11*). Later in *Hebrews 11* Abraham is commended for his faith in offering Isaac as a sacrifice. James depicts Abraham as an example of both faith and works working together (*James 2:23, 24*).

Genesis presents Abraham as a God-fearing man, hospitable to guests, magnanimous to relatives and servants, and respected by kings and other peoples. Sarah, however, remains mostly in the background. In the story of the near sacrifice of Isaac, where Abraham's faith is tested, Sarah is not even mentioned. The only times Sarah appears to take the initiative is first in offering Hagar to Abraham and next in insisting that the maidservant and her son Ishmael be sent away. What can we learn from this faithful but flawed couple?

The Week at a Glance: Though praised for faith, Abraham and Sarah were time and again examples of those who actually seemed to lack faith in God.

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

Human Solutions for God's Promise

This first promise to Abraham (*Gen. 12:2*) was not fulfilled within a “reasonable” time, and Abraham and his wife grew quite old. The older they got, the more serious became the matter of an heir or, rather, the lack of one. How could God’s promises be fulfilled? Could Abraham be excused if he sought other interpretations of the promise?

Abraham and Sarah first offered to adopt their servant Eliezer (*Gen. 15:2, 3, NIV*). Some ancient Nuzi tablets, dating to before the time of the patriarchs, shed light on the custom of a childless couple adopting a servant or his son to inherit property. In return the adopted servant had to ensure the adoptive parents a decent burial. The contract stated, however, that it would not stand if the couple subsequently had their own child. Abraham was within his legal rights to think of such a solution. It was an accepted custom.

How does the second promise in Genesis 15:4, 5 eliminate Eliezer as the promised heir? What more does it promise Abraham about his offspring?

The next attempt to secure an heir originated from Sarah. After they had been in Canaan ten years, she suggested that Abraham marry her maidservant Hagar (*Gen. 16:1–3*). Again, some Nuzi tablets have parallels. The wife of a childless couple could give her slave girl to her husband, retaining authority over any children that may result from the union. The Nuzi contracts also state that the son borne by a slave girl would inherit all the property unless the legal wife bore a son later. A son born thus to Abraham would even fulfill God’s promise of “coming from Abraham’s body.”

How does the third promise, in Genesis 17:16, 19, go beyond the earlier promises? How does it eliminate Ishmael as the promised heir? Read the fourth promise, in Genesis 18:10, 14. How is it the most specific?

Twenty-five years passed as Abraham and Sarah waited for the promised heir. With each promise and with each year that passed, God made it more evident that the son would be a miracle child.

In the context of today’s lesson, read Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:3. What hope can you draw from these texts?

Telling Lies

Though Abraham and Sarah were both children of Terah, they did not share the same mother. When God called Abraham to leave home, one of his concerns in facing the unknown was related to his beautiful wife. Abraham could not trust the morals of the heathen, so he told Sarah, his wife and half sister, to declare, wherever they went, that she was his sister rather than his wife (*Gen. 20:12, 13*).

What reasons did Abraham give for asking Sarah to lie? How valid and logical were those reasons? Why do you think he showed such a lack of trust? See *Gen. 12:11–13*.

During periods of famine, Canaanites often went to Egypt, where the fields were watered by the Nile. This was no trip to purchase food but a desire to settle there for a while (*Gen. 12:10*). However, escaping the danger of the famine brought a new danger. Though Sarah was in her 60s, her beauty still caused heads to turn. Abraham's fear was well founded. The Egyptians found her beauty striking enough to report the matter to Pharaoh. It is difficult to imagine how Abraham hoped to get out of this situation other than by lying.

God intervened by sending plagues upon Pharaoh (*vs. 17*), and Pharaoh lost no time in restoring Sarah to her husband and in reproving Abraham for his error. The chastised Abraham discovered that Egyptian ethics were superior to his, and that his lack of faith in God was unfounded.

Abraham and Sarah, however, forgot this lesson. Even though much time had passed, or maybe because it had, they repeated this same mistake (*Gen. 20:2*).

Have you ever found yourself in a situation in which you felt you had to lie in order to get out of a problem? Review what happened: What was your course of action that brought you to that situation to begin with? What was the result of your lie? What caused you to show such a lack of faith? What lessons did you learn that could help you from making the same mistakes again?

Laughing at God

Read Genesis 17:15–17. What was Abraham’s response to the promise made to him?

What was his other immediate reaction to the promise? *Gen. 17:18*. Why was that such a natural reaction despite God’s clear words to him?

Abraham lived to be 175 years old (*Gen. 25:7*). Sarah died at the age of 127 (*Gen. 23:1*). Their son, Isaac, lived to 180 (*Gen. 35:28*). Proportionately, it could be today as though Abraham and Sarah were in their 50s when this promise was made to them again. Not surprisingly, the normally unflappable Abraham fell on his face laughing when God repeated the promise of the child to be born to them.

A short while later three heavenly visitors came to Abraham, and while they ate the food Sarah prepared, one of them predicted that the promised child would be born in about a year (*Gen. 18:10*). Like typical Bedouin women, Sarah had stayed out of sight but not out of hearing. Just behind the entrance to the tent she laughed to herself when she heard the prediction (*vs. 12*). This was not a laugh of joy but an element of disbelief.

Though Sarah lied in response to the Lord’s inquiry, what was the reason she laughed? *Gen. 18:11, 12*.

Paul in Romans 4:19 describes Sarah’s womb as dead. Indeed, she was from a purely physical standpoint way past childbearing age. When questioned, she tried to cover her disbelief with a lie. The lie did not do its work, and the matter closed on that uncomfortable note.

When the promised child was born, as instructed by God, Abraham named him Isaac, which means “he laughs” (*Gen. 17:19*). The word *Yitzhak* means what it sounds like—a loud, explosive laugh. Sarah added, “‘God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me’” (*Gen. 21:6, NIV*).

Write a paragraph about what you believe is the most important lesson for us in this account of Abraham and Sarah. Bring your response to class on Sabbath.

Trouble Because of Unbelief

“Then Sarai said to Abram, ‘You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me’ ” (*Gen. 16:5, NIV; see also Gen. 16:1–6, 21:8–13, Gal. 4:21–31*).

Of the Nuzi tablets referred to earlier, one of them has a close parallel with the Abraham-Hagar episode. Kelim-ninu is given in marriage to Shennima. The contract states that if Kelim-ninu is barren, she is to take the initiative in obtaining a slave girl for Shennima. Any children the slave girl bears will come under the authority of Kelim-ninu.

Among the gifts that Pharaoh lavished on Abraham and Sarah in Egypt were menservants and maidservants (*Gen. 12:16*). Hagar, her personal maidservant, was an Egyptian and may have been one of those given them by Pharaoh.

When Hagar realized she was pregnant, she belittled her mistress. How was this attitude emulated by her son? *Gen. 21:9*.

Sarah was the first to realize her mistake in giving her maidservant to be a concubine. This became a thorn in their relationship, and it brought grief to all of them. Ishmael was about seventeen when Isaac was weaned (about three). The occasion that sidelined him caused Ishmael to mock (the Hebrew word is *metzahek*) Isaac. Not a happy laugh but a derisive one. Sarah sensed his presence as a threat and insisted that the slave mother and son be dismissed. God concurred (*Gen. 21:12*).

While Paul does not name Sarah and Hagar, it is obvious that he refers to them in the New Testament. What does he use these women to symbolize? *Gal. 4:21–31*.

Paul further adds that those who attempt to gain salvation by works are in spiritual bondage and tend to persecute those who rely on faith and grace for their salvation and who are free.

What day-by-day things can you do to increase your trust in God and thus avoid the kind of disastrous decisions that unbelief can lead to?

Ultimate Demonstration of Faith

Read Genesis 22. What great lesson about faith, and the cost of faith, can you take out of this story?

Canaanites practiced child sacrifice for centuries. Molech and Chemosh, the national gods of the Ammonites and the Moabites, required that children be offered to them in a fire. Assyrians around 800 B.C. offered children to the god Adramelech. Though revolting, the custom does reveal commitment. No parent can easily give up a child to be burnt. Yet the practice must be seen as selfish, for it sacrifices the life of a helpless child for the gain of the parents. Mesha, king of Moab, offered his heir to the throne when he faced defeat in battle (*2 Kings 3:27*).

The Israelites would be faced with this custom as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. Read in Leviticus 18:21 the specific instruction of God regarding this practice. Note in 2 Kings 16:3 the extent of the practice in Israel and Judah.

Abraham could well have been smug in his confidence that his God would never require him to do what his pagan neighbors did in their devotion to false gods. His son was the gift from God. Imagine his shock when God actually instructed him to sacrifice his son; imagine how he must have felt about the prospect of coming home to Sarah with the blood of their son on his hands! However, Abraham knew the voice of God and trusted Him. In fact, he informs his servants that “we will come back to you” (*Gen. 22:5, NIV*), reasoning that God could raise him from the dead (*Heb. 11:19*).

James uses Abraham as an example of faith and works. James 2:22 makes the key point, how works and faith go together.

We’re not all called upon to make such great sacrifices for the Lord. But we do need to make them anyway. Look at how you’ve lived your life during the past year. What kind of choices have you made? Are they choices that reflect an attitude of surrender to God? If not, what changes must you make?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“This was not the first occasion on which Abraham had passed Sarah off as his sister. It would almost seem to have been his usual practice, but that heretofore Egypt had been the only place where the ruse caused trouble. Years of success in employing the same deception, since that bitter experience with Pharaoh, had made Abraham forgetful of its lesson of strict rectitude. . . .

“However that may be, the time for the birth of the promised seed was rapidly approaching . . . and Satan took advantage of Abraham’s weakness to thwart the divine plan.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 341.

“We need the faith of Abraham in our day, to lighten the darkness that gathers around us, shutting out the sweet sunlight of God’s love, and dwarfing spiritual growth. Our faith should be prolific of good works; for faith without works is dead.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 115.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final question. What can you learn from one another?
- 2 As a class, share your thoughts on the fact that despite their faults, mistakes, and lack of judgment, Abraham and Sarah are held up as examples of faith. What hope does that present that you could use to encourage those who feel, perhaps, that their failures are too much and that God has rejected them?
- 3 Have those who are willing talk about a time when they had to make a great sacrifice for God. What can you learn from their experiences?
- 4 The mistake with Hagar brought a great amount of grief to the family. How can you help any families you know now who are suffering because of mistakes made by the parents?

Summary: Abraham’s and Sarah’s deficiency in faith is highlighted by the duplication of their errors in offering substitute heirs, lying, and laughing. They were not perfect humans, but they loved God and followed His commands. Ultimately, they are examples of great faith.

Good Life From Bad

Maria Medina grew up in Chile with an abusive father. She had to quit school at age 15 to work. The next year her mother fled home, taking Maria with her. When Maria became pregnant at 18, she preferred to raise the child alone rather than take a chance that the baby's father might become the same abusive kind of man that her father had been. She shared a small apartment with her new baby, her mother, and her brother. They managed the best they could.

When she was 21, an Adventist neighbor gave her some literature about God and offered to study the Bible with her. Maria loved reading the Bible. For the first time in her life she realized that God loves her. She began attending the Seventh-day Adventist church and was overjoyed with her new relationship with God.

As she learned of the power of forgiveness, she realized that she must forgive her father for what he had done to her and the family. His alcoholism had stolen everything the family had worked so hard for, and he still drank. She prayed about going back for months before she felt strong enough to go. Then she confronted her father. "Father," she said, "I forgive you for what you have done to me and to our family. I want to live without hate in my heart, so I forgive you."

"How can you forgive me for what I have done to you and your mother?" he sobbed. Then he told her he had tried to stop drinking, but had not yet broken the habit, though he was drinking far less than when the family lived with him.

Maria's mother and brother are deaf. She has shared her faith with them, but it has been difficult for them to make friends in the church. Eventually, however, they accepted the Adventist faith and joined the church.

Maria rejoices that God has brought so much good into her life, a life that started out so badly. She loves to share her faith with others.



Mission offerings provide materials and evangelistic outreach to lead people such as Maria to Christ. Thank you.

MARIA MEDINA (left) lives in southern Chile, where she shares her faith with all who will listen.

Isaac *and* Rebekah: Rearing Rivals



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 26–28.*

Memory Text: “‘May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples.’” (*Genesis 28:3, NKJV*).

Isaac and Rebekah duplicated many events of Abraham's and Sarah's lives. (1) Isaac laid claim to the covenant promises that had been made by God to Abraham. (2) Both Sarah and Rebekah were barren an unreasonably long time. (3) Both families endured disputes about ownership of wells with local people among whom they had been instructed by God to live. (4) Both Abraham and Isaac took their families to a foreign land to ride out a famine. (5) Abraham informed the people of Gerar that Sarah, his wife, was his half sister. Isaac told the same people, a generation later, that Rebekah, his wife, was his sister. (6) Both families had to deal with sibling rivalry.

At the same time, too, Isaac and Rebekah had a lot going for them in their marriage and home. Too bad some wrong choices were made, choices that led to painful consequences for the whole family.

Let's learn what we can from their mistakes, in hopes of not doing the same thing ourselves.

The Week at a Glance: However different their environment from ours, we can learn some good spiritual lessons from the story of this dysfunctional family.

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

The Arrangement

Read Genesis 24 and then answer the following questions:

1. Why would Abraham be so adamant that his son not take a wife from among the Canaanites?

2. What was the key to the servant's success in finding the right woman for Isaac?

3. What do we learn from this story about the character and faith of Rebekah? How might these attributes have contributed to making her the right choice for Isaac?

Sarah had been dead three years when Abraham called his trusted servant, probably Eliezer of Damascus, to whom he had thought to bequeath his estate (*Gen. 15:2*). Though Abraham would live another 35 years, he was an old man at this time. Isaac had reached the age of 40 and needed a wife to carry on the covenant line. A messenger had earlier reported to Abraham that Nahor, his brother, and his wife, Milcah, had been blessed with eight sons (*Gen. 22:20–24*). Now Abraham instructed his servant to fetch a wife for Isaac from among those relatives.

Of course, there was always the outside chance that the girl would be unwilling to accompany him back to a strange land, and Eliezer needed clear instruction how to proceed if that turned out to be the case. If so, he would be released from the oath. Under no circumstances was Isaac to leave the land that God had covenanted to them. Abraham picked his agent well; the servant was determined to do God's will in such an important matter.

It's one thing to say, I want to leave everything in God's hands regarding important matters; it's another to actually do this. Next time you face an important decision, what practical steps can you take in order to place yourself in a position where you can discern God's will and be surrendered enough to accept it?

Jacob and Esau

Rebekah, unlike Sarah, had no rival wives or concubines to contend with, and no stepchildren to compete with. Theirs should have been a happy home. Yet, even in this “ideal” situation, strife arose.

Read the story of Esau and Jacob in Genesis 25:19–34. In what ways were the parents to blame for the strife that arose among the brothers?

At the birth of those boys, the Lord gave Rebekah a message about their future. What was that message, and what do we see in the story about the character of these boys that helps explain their fate?

What we see in this story isn’t God’s *determining* the future but simply *predicting* it. It was the choices of the boys that led to their fate, not God’s predestination of that fate for them.

The sale of the birthright confirms that Esau is disinterested in spiritual matters; his actions certainly revealed him unfit to be the spiritual leader of the clan.

Jacob, on the other hand, is farsighted. He desires the spiritual leadership, is cunning enough to trick his brother out of it, and even gets the transaction sealed by an oath. Esau eats and goes away, not the least bothered about what he has given up.

“Because of his indifference to the divine blessings and requirements, Esau is called in Scripture ‘a profane person.’ . . . He represents those who lightly value the redemption purchased for them by Christ, and are ready to sacrifice their heirship to heaven for the perishable things of earth. Multitudes live for the present, with no thought or care for the future. Like Esau they cry, ‘Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.’ 1 Corinthians 15:32.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 181, 182.

How seriously do you take the redemption you have in Christ? How can you be careful not to sell it for a bowl of porridge? Why is that easier to do than one might think?

The Birthright—Content and Context of the Contest

The events in Genesis 26 surely took place before those in chapter 25. Isaac could not have hoped to pass Rebekah off as his sister if they had twins. The repetitions of the Abrahamic covenant to Isaac clarify what exactly Jacob bargained with Esau for. These promises are what Jacob hoped to inherit. This was a spiritual heritage with a serious responsibility. This is the privilege that Esau despised and Jacob coveted.

What promises in the Abrahamic covenant were confirmed to Isaac?
Gen. 26:4.

These promises were not easy to believe. Isaac and Rebekah had no children yet—but *these children would become as numerous as the stars?* They were nomads wandering from country to country—but *God would give them “all these lands”?* (*Gen. 26:4, NKJV*).

Note the similarities in the experience of Isaac and Rebekah and Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 20, 21, and 26.

Name of the place (20:1, 26:1) _____

Name of the king (20:2, 26:1) _____

Lying about (20:2, 26:7) _____

Explanation for lie (20:11, 26:9) _____

Remonstrance because of the lie (20:9, 26:10) _____

The Lord has just appeared to Isaac and given to him a wonderful promise. Isaac now knows not only the reality of God but His promises. He should have been a man of faith, trusting in God’s ability to fulfill those promises. (After all, when was the last time God “appeared” to any of us and spoke to us?) Yet, soon afterward we see Isaac resorting to lies.

Maybe because of the promise, that he would have a great seed, Isaac lied to protect himself from death. What lesson can we learn from this story about how easy it is to show lack of trust in God?

Stealing the Blessing

Read Genesis 27 and then answer the following questions:

1. Why did Jacob show some hesitancy in perpetrating this fraud on his father? What does that reason say about his character?
2. What were the material advantages that came with the blessing? How might that have explained each one's desire for it?
3. What did Isaac do that showed he had his suspicions? What reasons might he have had for them?
4. What reasons did Rebekah have for instigating this deception?

In the opening verses of Genesis 27 Isaac has two thoughts: (1) he is getting old and needs to pass on his blessing, and (2) his mouth is watering for some tasty food. Here we encounter a play on words. While Esau sold his *bekorah* (birthright) for a bowl of lentils, Isaac will give his *berakah* (blessing) in exchange for some venison. Rebekah will try to get the *berakah* for her favorite son.

We could defend Rebekah. After all, she is fighting the unjust institution of the blessing by which one child gets everything and the other nothing (*Gen. 27:37*). This is especially unfair in the case of twins. Maybe she thought she was carrying out the will of God, who had predicted the dominance of the younger. Maybe she knew, as Isaac must have known, that Esau was unsuited for the birthright and the blessings that came with it but that Jacob possessed those necessary qualities.

In the end, everyone suffered because of the deception. What lessons can we learn from this story about the consequences of our actions? Take heed. Watch and pray before you act!

Wives and the Covenant

When Esau was 40, he got married (*Gen. 26:34, 35*). The problem was not just that Esau married two wives. Polygamy existed as early as the time of Lamech (*Gen. 4:23*). Abraham had several wives, and Jacob himself would end up in polygamy. The main problem was that Esau's wives were Hittites and probably not worshipers of Yahweh.

Bringing outside blood into the family was risky. But Abraham, too, had brought in Hagar, an Egyptian, and thought to make her son his heir. The worst problem, however, was that the Hittite daughters-in-law of Isaac and Rebekah endangered the worship of Yahweh among their descendants, possibly insisting on worshipping their own gods. Since they were two, it may have been easier to get their way. This threat is what must have caused grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Keeping their sons' marriages within the family would have served to protect the Abrahamic covenant.

How did Rebekah use this issue as an excuse to get Jacob out of angry Esau's reach? *Gen. 27:46–28:5*.

Isaac readily agreed to the plan, and he himself charged Jacob, instructing him to go quickly. The earlier blessing Jacob had stolen from Esau said nothing about the covenant blessings. Now, as Jacob prepared to leave, Isaac gave him the blessing he wanted all along.

What were the blessings given to Jacob? *Gen. 28:3, 4*. How did these differ from the blessings given to Esau?

Before Isaac gave Jacob the covenant blessings, he specifically charged him not to take a wife from among the Canaanites but to get one from among their own clan. It was afterward that he gave him the promised blessings. Could there have been a link between this admonition and the blessings? If so, what?

What promises of God are especially important to you? At the same time, ask yourself, How can I make the kind of choices that will allow these promises to be fulfilled in my life?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “A United Front,” pp. 312–316, in *The Adventist Home*.

“What a contrast between the course of Isaac and that pursued by the youth of our time, even among professed Christians! Young people too often feel that the bestowal of their affections is a matter in which self alone should be consulted—a matter that neither God nor their parents should in any wise control. Long before they have reached manhood or womanhood, they think themselves competent to make their own choice, without the aid of their parents. A few years of married life are usually sufficient to show them their error, but often too late to prevent its baleful results. For the same lack of wisdom and self-control that dictated the hasty choice is permitted to aggravate the evil, until the marriage relation becomes a galling yoke. Many have thus wrecked their happiness in this life and their hope of the life to come.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 80.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Think about all the strife and suffering that could have been avoided had Rebekah and Isaac made wiser choices. What principles did they violate, and what can we learn from their mistakes that could help protect our homes from unneeded suffering?
- ❷ There’s a certain irony in the attitudes and actions of Rebekah. She was upset that Esau had married foreign women, because they could lead him away from the true God. And yet she was the one who pushed Jacob into this horrible deception. What kind of inconsistency do we see there? In what ways can we be in danger of doing something similar? *See also Matt. 23:23.*
- ❸ Is there someone you know who is facing an important decision? If so, what can you as a class do to give that person the best possible guidance? What can you do to help that person discern the will of God in making that choice?

Summary: Isaac and Rebekah could have avoided much trouble in their home if they had followed principles of truth and honesty. God had spoken, and they should have trusted Him and cooperated with Him.

Faithful Friend

by HANS OLSON

Setsuko and Meiko have been friends for 15 years, ever since Setsuko, a literature evangelist, knocked on Meiko's door and offered her a subscription to *Signs of the Times*[®]. Meiko liked the magazine and subscribed. She also bought some books. Meiko's daughter began attending a branch Sabbath School program.

When Meiko's family moved to be near her husband's parents, Setsuko stayed in touch with her. Meiko continued to read the magazines and books.

As the wife of the eldest son in Japanese culture, Meiko felt compelled to respect her mother-in-law's Shinto religion. Meiko accompanied her mother-in-law to worship in the shrines, but Meiko wanted to find meaning in her own life. As Meiko searched, Setsuko remained a faithful friend. Meiko was not free to pursue Christianity at this time, but she continued reading *Signs of the Times*[®] and sought out other books to help her resolve the conflicts in her life and bring her peace. In time she found the God she was seeking.

Eventually Meiko's family returned to Yokohama, and Meiko and Setsuko reconnected in person. Setsuko invited Meiko to attend meetings at her church. Far from her mother-in-law, Meiko finally felt she could attend a Christian church. As Meiko sat in the church, she whispered to her friend, "At last I am home." For 15 years Meiko had struggled to find meaning, and at last she had found what she was searching for.

Meiko praised God that her husband did not resist her desire to be a Christian. But now Meiko faced a new problem: As a faithful daughter-in-law, she could not keep her faith in God a secret from her mother-in-law. But how could she tell her without hurting her? Meiko gently explained her new religious experience to her mother-in-law, who listened carefully. Meiko apologized for letting her mother-in-law down. She worried that her in-laws would disown her following her revelation of faith in Christ. But her mother-in-law wished Meiko well. Their relationship has become closer than it ever had been. They respect each other's religion.

When Meiko was baptized, she asked her friend Setsuko to be her spiritual guardian.

Your mission offerings help bring the hope of Jesus to hearts chained by culture and superstition. Thank you.

SETSUKO IWAI and SEINO (MEIKO) KATSUMATA live in Yokohama, where they continue to share their love for God with others. Hans Olson is managing editor of Mission.

Jacob *and* Rachel: Labor of Love



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 29:1–31:16.*

Memory Text: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (*Ephesians 5:25*).

Against the backdrop of an Old Testament culture in which marriages were arranged by the parents, Jacob and Rachel stand out as an example of a love marriage. Esau also had selected his own wives, but he is not recorded as “loving” them. In a case similar to Jacob’s, Moses married the daughter of one with whom he took refuge, but again, he is not stated to have fallen in love with her. Thus, Jacob’s love for Rachel must have been extraordinary to warrant repeated mention. His love has acquired legendary status probably for good reason.

Yet, the marriage of Jacob and Rachel does not end with the “happily ever after” style. When he left Padanaram 20 years after he got there, Jacob had acquired great wealth in terms of flocks and herds. But their relationship underwent many trials and troubles. Though conditions were not always ideal, their love never suffered. Their strong love, it seems, enabled them to endure all difficulties. Rachel’s early death did not diminish Jacob’s love for her children but rather heightened it.

The Week at a Glance: Of all the lessons we can learn from this couple, perhaps the most important one is that our actions and mistakes have consequences that go far beyond ourselves.

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

Marrying Within the Faith

We left off with Isaac and Rebekah sending off Jacob, to keep him from marrying outside the faith and to get him away from his angry brother. Esau had sworn that as soon as Isaac was dead, he would kill Jacob for stealing his blessing (*Gen. 27:41*). We also left off noting that Isaac began the covenant blessing by telling Jacob not to marry from the Canaanites but to take a wife from his own clan.

When you consider the covenant blessing (*see Gen. 28:1–4*), why was the choice of the right wife important for the blessing to be fulfilled?

Marrying within the faith is so important to the patriarchs that the problem of marrying within the family is overlooked. Abraham is married to his half sister, Isaac to his cousin, and now Jacob is instructed by Isaac to seek a wife from among the daughters of Laban—his own cousins. Abraham had strictly instructed his trusted servant not to get a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites (*Gen. 24:3*). Esau also realized how offensive his pagan wives were to Isaac, so he went and married yet another wife—the daughter of his uncle Ishmael.

What evidence can we find from the wickedness that helped bring the Flood that could help us understand why marrying “out of the faith” was deemed so bad? *See Gen. 6:1–5*.

Some believe that the wickedness was in angels’ marrying humans. But Jesus said that angels do not marry (*Mark 12:25*). Others see the wickedness here as polygamy as practiced by dynastic rulers among the descendants of Cain. Lamech is an example of one (*Gen. 4:19*). One would wonder why polygamy would be condemned so indirectly. The interpretation easiest to understand is that godly descendants, “the sons of God,” were intermarrying with the “daughters of men,” those who weren’t the Lord’s followers, and this was terrible in God’s sight.

Second Corinthians 6:14 gives a principle that should be heeded not only in marriage but in other activities, as well. Inevitably, however, most of us are, at one time or another, “yoked” with unbelievers. What principles should we keep in mind when faced with these situations?

Working and Waiting

Read Genesis 29:1–15. From what we can tell in the text, how pure were Laban’s motives toward Jacob, at least at first?

Whatever his motives were to start, eventually Laban saw in Jacob a bargain. He’d eventually have to marry his daughters off anyway; why not get what he could for a dowry?

Dowry in the Old Testament takes several forms. It appears that the bride’s father gave a maidservant to his daughter at the time of marriage. Thus Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel acquired maidservants (*Gen. 16:1; 24:61; 29:24, 29*). However, the groom, too, was expected to give gifts to the bride’s family. Abraham’s servant gave gold and silver jewelry and expensive clothes to Rebekah and other costly gifts to her mother and brother Laban. In contrast, Jacob had arrived penniless and had nothing to offer except labor, and he offered to work seven years for Rachel.

Read Genesis 29:15–30. What was behind such treachery? What does that tell us about the power of greed to override honesty and decency?

How did Laban justify his act? (*Gen. 29:26*). Why was that such a lame excuse?

As the local man, Laban would have the support of the town’s people. Jacob was the refugee. As the employer, Laban had Jacob at his mercy. At the end of seven years he had paid nothing yet. Most of all, Jacob’s love for Rachel held him captive to Laban. He thus had no option but to submit meekly to the treachery. We see only a mild protest from the helpless young man. He had to work another seven years for Rachel, but he was eventually allowed to marry her.

Look again at Laban’s excuse. In what ways do we need to be careful of doing the same thing; that is, using the excuse of customs or traditions (or anything, really) in order to justify unjust acts?

Family Strife

Read Genesis 29:28–30:24 and then answer these questions:

1. In what ways was this family making the same marital mistakes as their ancestors?

2. In what ways were the strife and envy between the women manifested?

3. How did Jacob's actions make matters worse?

The competition between the two sisters led to them giving their maidservants to Jacob to bear sons for them. When Rachel's maidservant bore her second son, Rachel declared, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won" (*Gen. 30:8, NIV*). Rachel had said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die" (*vs. 1, NIV*). These words proved ironic, as Rachel finally died in childbirth (*Gen. 35:16–18*). When she finally bore a son, she named him Joseph, meaning "may he add," saying, "May the Lord add to me another son" (*Gen. 30:24, NIV*). Tragically, the birth of her second son killed her.

Notice the words of Rachel to Jacob in Genesis 30:1 and the desperation that they reveal. When was the last time you were in a desperate situation that only God could solve? How did you react? What lessons did you learn that could help you if something similar were to happen again?

Jacob's Leaving

Review what we've read so far about this family. What were the sins and mistakes that each person made? What does this tell us about how belief alone, even in the true God, isn't enough to change our lives the way that God would have them changed? *See 2 Cor. 7:1.*

Though not graphic, this story of Laban and Jacob and his wives is sordid enough. Each character is guilty in his or her own way. Even Jacob, the patriarch, a follower of the true God, is hardly much of a representative of that God. This is just another biblical account of how far humans have fallen and how desperately in need of grace we all are.

Based on Genesis 30:25–31:16, how would you answer the following questions?

1. What caused Laban's attitude toward Jacob to change? What lesson is there for us?

2. What are some of the good characteristics found in Jacob?

3. What was Laban's daughters' attitude toward their father? Was it justified?

Even amid all this deceit, trickery, passion, jealousy, favoritism, and on and on, the Lord was there, working out His plan despite human foibles. At the same time, how much better this story could have been had people loved God first and one another as themselves. As you go about your daily business, in what ways can you consciously seek to live as God would have you live, thus avoiding much needless pain?

Playing Favorites

Read Genesis 29:30. What recipe for family disaster is found in this verse?

No question, God was working in the life of Jacob, even despite his faults. Yet, those faults weren't minor; they brought pain and suffering not only upon himself but upon his loved ones. When will we learn to think before we act, to contemplate the possible results of the choices we make? How many of us would love to turn back the clock and do things differently? Unfortunately, we can't. All we can do is try not to make the same mistakes in the future.

Of all the mistakes Jacob made, one of the worst was the favoritism he showed toward Rachel. Sure, Leah wasn't the one he wanted, but he was still married to her, and he didn't seem to mind bearing all these children with her either.

Read Genesis 33:1–3. What example of favoritism toward Rachel did he show there?

Even after Rachel died, Jacob continued to show his favoritism to the children he bore with her. Joseph was the recipient of the coat of many colors (*Gen. 37:3*), and Benjamin was the one held back by the father as the others went to buy grain from Egypt (*Gen. 42:4*), even though he already had ten other sons (*Gen. 46:21*).

There's no doubt that this blatant favoritism brought a great deal of suffering to the family. If only Jacob had lived according to the principles of the God he followed, how much better his life would have been. It's a lesson that applies to all of us, as well. How careful we need to be in the relationships we form.

Of course, most of us don't have to deal with the complications arising from polygamous marriages, but we all need to be careful in how we treat others. No doubt Leah and eventually the children she bore were all pained by Jacob's actions. What can you do to be more careful in dealing with the feelings of others who are dependent upon your love and affection?

Further Study: “Rachel,” pp. 924, 925, in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*; also read Ellen G. White, “Jacob’s Flight and Exile,” pp. 183–194, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Preach in your lives the practical godliness of the faith that you believe. Let it be seen that the truth never degrades the receiver, making him rough and coarse, or fretful and impatient. Make apparent to all your patience, your kindness, your long-suffering, gentleness, compassion, and true goodness; for these graces are the expression of the character of the God whom you serve.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 400.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Talk about the question of being unequally yoked with unbelievers. How are we as Christians to act when we face this situation? What can we learn from one another’s experiences?
- 2 What advice would you give to someone who was thinking about marrying outside the faith?
- 3 We can learn a lot from the story this week about how not to act. What principles can we learn from what we’ve read that can help us better avoid the kind of mistakes that this family made?
- 4 Greed is a powerful passion within the human heart. What ways can we protect ourselves from being swept up by it?
- 5 If a couple in your class has been married a long time, have them explain what the keys are to a happy marriage. What are the principles? What must couples never do? What should they always do? How can we apply those principles (when applicable) to other areas of our lives?

Summary: Yes, they were a dysfunctional family by all accounts. Their actions all came with bad consequences, too. How important that we learn from their mistakes and not follow the principles of greed and selfishness and jealousy that brought so much heartache.

Watching God Work: Part 1

The break-up of communism in Eastern Europe left many people desperate to earn enough money to live. Maria, like many others, sought work in another country. Though she has a teaching degree, she works for a family in the Middle East, cleaning, cooking, and caring for a child. Although such workers are paid little by the country's standards, it is good money for Maria.

Maria and other Adventist women have found that their new jobs, though menial and seldom praised, afford them a rare opportunity to share their faith. "We—my Adventist sisters and I—are amazed when we think of how God is leading us," she says. "We enter into the homes of wealthy and influential people in this country, care for their homes and children. And even though we do not speak the language of our hosts well, by our lives we can influence people who would never open their door and allow us to share our faith and tell them of God's love.

"People in this country do not want to know about Christians or their God, so we cannot preach to them. But they see God in our lives, and God performs miracles and opens their hearts to our message. Somehow they sense that we are not like other Christians. We don't drink or smoke, and we keep the Sabbath. Many times they tell us, "You are like Muslims; you are very close to us."

In the family for which Maria works, the extended family often gathers for dinner. After they eat, they sit and talk politics and have a drink. One evening as the men talked, Maria's boss asked her to serve them some drinks. Maria gently told her boss that she could not serve the drinks. Suddenly the room became quiet, and 25 faces looked at her. Her boss was surprised by her refusal, and she, too, was embarrassed.

Then Maria felt a power in herself and told her boss, "I do not serve alcohol because I do not drink alcohol. It is forbidden by Allah. And the things I do not take part in, I do not offer to others." Her employer nodded. She left the room, wondering whether she would be reprimanded or, worse, fired.

(Continued next week)

MARIA lives and shares her faith in the Middle East.

Moses *and* Zipporah: Relating With Relations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exodus 2–4, 18:1–27, Num. 12:1–4.*

Memory Text: “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (*Hebrews 11:24, 25*).

Moses is one of the best known of all Old Testament characters; Zipporah, his wife, is one of the lesser known. Being a foreigner and from a despised nation, she obviously remained as much in the background as possible. However, as we’ll soon see, she turned out to be a faithful wife who remained with Moses during the trials of the Exodus. At the same time, his marriage to her brought Jethro into the family of Moses, and this turned out to be a great blessing, not just to Moses but to the children of Israel as a whole. Though we can learn many lessons from their story, perhaps the most important one is this: The right family relations can be wonderful; the wrong ones, unfortunately, can bring terrible results.

The Week at a Glance: When Zipporah married Moses, she had no idea what she was getting into. Yet, she and her family were a great help to Moses and aided him in his divine mission. This week we’ll see just what blessings a good wife and good in-laws can bring.

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

Chivalry at the Well

Like Jacob centuries earlier, Moses, after hiking a few hundred miles, arrived at a settlement in the wilderness, which revolved around a well. Both had run for their lives—Jacob from his brother Esau and Moses from Pharaoh. What a difference, though, in the reasons for their flight!

Why did Moses flee? *Exod. 2:11–15*. What does this incident tell us about his character? What does this tell us about his allegiance to his own people, despite his great privileges in the house of another nation?

Read Exodus 2:15–17 (see also Acts 7:23–29). From what we know about the character of Moses, why were his actions at the well not surprising?

Sitting by the well, Moses observed that rough shepherds had not merely chased away the seven daughters of Jethro but had waited till the daughters had drawn water for their flock and then drove them away so that they could water their own sheep with that water (*Exod. 2:17*). Moses, apparently, could not bear to see injustice. This is what had gotten him into trouble in Egypt.

According to Exodus 2:19, the daughters described Moses to their father as an “Egyptian,” probably on the basis of his dress, which showed the degree that the culture had influenced Moses. Moses was not only alone but clearly a foreigner. Though the text doesn’t say how, he was obviously able to wield enough power and authority to drive the shepherds away.

Reuel, another name for Jethro (see *Exod. 2:18, 3:1*), chides the girls for not inviting their hero in for supper. Zipporah, probably the eldest, is promised to Moses in marriage, and in return Moses takes charge of his father-in-law’s flock, just as Jacob did for Laban centuries earlier (*Exod. 3:1*).

It was one of Moses’ own people who endangered his life. What does this tell us about how careful we need to be with those who are closest to us, lest we inadvertently hurt them?

Moses and His Father-in-Law

Moses' father-in-law is referred to by at least two names—Reuel (*Exod. 2:18*) and Jethro (*Exod. 3:1*). However, Reuel means “friend of God” and could be a title that he held as a priest. There are several examples of Old Testament characters having more than one name (Esau/Edom, Jacob/Israel).

Jethro's immediate response to the report of Moses' chivalry was to chide his daughters for leaving behind such a man. He bade them invite him for a meal. Moses, on his part, was happy to stay with such a man; indeed, he spent 40 peaceful years in his home.

Read carefully Moses' words to his father-in-law about his returning to Egypt (*Exod. 4:18*). What reasons does he give; what reasons does he not give? Was he being dishonest?

Jethro doesn't appear in the Bible again until Exodus 18:1–12. Imagine the surprise he must have had. His son-in-law leaves on what was supposed to be a family visit and comes back the leader of several million people! He was obviously impressed by what happened and gave praise and sacrifice to the Lord (*vss. 10–12*). How much Jethro knew about the Lord is not known; however impressed, he apparently still believed in the existence of other gods (*vs. 11*).

Read over Exodus 18. What evidence do we find here of Moses' great respect for his father-in-law, despite whatever theological weaknesses the man had? What evidence of the great wisdom of Jethro do we see here?

How interesting that it was his father-in-law, someone not even of Moses' own blood, someone who was still (apparently) a polytheist, who gave Moses such good advice in the governing of these people. Moses obviously believed that it must have been God's will, otherwise he wouldn't have consented.

How easy it could have been for Moses to brush off the advice of this “pagan.” Instead, he listened. What's the lesson? How open are you to good advice, even when it comes from unexpected sources?

Zipporah and Her Husband's Religion

Read Exodus 4:19–26. What is happening here? Why did Zipporah do what she did?

Several peoples of the ancient Near East practiced circumcision. So it was not a new custom that God invented for His people. He just gave it new meaning. For many it was a sign of marriage, performed when a man was wedded, but God used it as a sign of His special link with His chosen people. God instructed Abraham to circumcise every male in his household on the eighth day (*Gen. 17:9–14*). Abraham was 99 when this was carried out.

The context sheds light on the severity of Moses' neglect to circumcise his son. God tells Moses to demand that Pharaoh release Israel, “‘my firstborn son’” (*Exod. 4:22, NIV*). As a consequence of not releasing His “firstborn son,” Israel, God threatens to kill Pharaoh's firstborn son (*vs. 23*). In the next verse (*vs. 24*) we are informed that God intended to kill Moses for not circumcising his son, most likely his firstborn (*Exod. 2:22*).

By answering the following questions, attempt to see the matter from God's point of view:

(1) Did Moses know that Israelite male children were to be circumcised? (2) Did Moses know about the significance of circumcision? (3) How might the Israelites respond if they knew that Moses had not circumcised his son? (4) How would God feel about His messenger living in open disobedience to His command?

Moses was on the threshold of a mission that is a matter of life and death for the Egyptians, as well as for the Israelites. His own life might be sought by the Egyptians, or by the Israelites if their rescue was frustrated. Moses' personal safety lay completely in the hands of God. No detail of God's instruction for personal life must be overlooked.

We are not told why Zipporah called Moses a “‘bridegroom of blood’” (*Exod. 4:25, NIV*). Most likely circumcision was to Zipporah a “bloody” ritual. The custom was probably repulsive to her. It could be that she had objected to the circumcision of her son and therefore felt responsibility for what was happening. Nevertheless, sensing God's displeasure, she took it upon herself to do what Moses, God's man, should have done himself.

Zipporah With Miriam and Aaron

Read Numbers 12:1–3. There is a suggestion that this Cushite wife is not Zipporah, because Zipporah was a Midianite; instead, the woman here was a new wife that Moses might have taken after the possible death of Zipporah. There is no biblical evidence for a second marriage of Moses, which would have been a big event had there been one. Besides, Zipporah the Midianite might be referred to as a Cushite (*Hab. 3:7*). Cushan is used as a parallel term for Midian and is perhaps even an older poetical term for Midian.

Read Exodus 2:1–9; Exodus 15:20, 21; Micah 6:4. What can we learn about the character, gifts, and privileges of Miriam from these texts? See also Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 382.

What horrible traits do we see revealed in both Miriam and Aaron in Numbers 12:1?

Human prejudice remains one of the enduring and damnable results of the Fall. Even people as gifted and honored and blessed as Miriam and Aaron weren't immune. What made matters worse here was that Zipporah had proved herself loyal and faithful to Israel through all the trials of the Israelite nation. According to Exodus 4:20, she and their children went with Moses back to Egypt. She saved Moses' life (*vs. 26*). Who knows what would have happened to Israel had Moses died. Even worse was that this kind of prejudice should come from leaders of people who themselves were the objects of scorn from another nation.

What was the real issue in the attack on Moses' wife? *Num. 12:2*.

Miriam and Aaron felt their authority decline. They connected this trend to the wife of Moses. It is her father who influenced Moses to appoint scores of leaders who reported to Moses when they had difficult cases. The attack on Zipporah may not have been an innocent pretext to discredit Moses. Aaron and Miriam may never have accepted their brother's wife, and after seeing her family in the wilderness, they may have despised her even more.

Why is racial or ethnic prejudice repugnant in those who profess to follow Christ? What concrete steps can you take to help purge your heart of this sinful disease?

Moses and His Brother-in-Law

It's been said that when you get married, you don't marry just the spouse; you get his or her family, as well. Moses was no exception either.

Read Numbers 10:29, 30. What's going on here? Why did Moses make this offer?

According to Moses, if Hobab agreed to come, he and his family would partake of God's blessings promised for Israel. At the same time, Hobab's presence would provide family for Zipporah, Moses' wife.

What symbolism is found in this idea, that of Gentiles partaking of the blessings of Israel? *Isa. 56:1-7, Rom. 11:17-19.*

From the stories of Moses it was clear that God had His hand over the Israelites. The future held great promise. But it was a tough life being on the move. While Moses, their leader, was Hobab's brother-in-law, it was not an easy decision for Hobab to leave his people and cast his lot with another. Maybe that's why Hobab, at least at this point, said No.

What does Moses say in Numbers 10:31, 32 that shows some ulterior motives for the invitation of Hobab?

Moses' actions are not totally understandable in light of the pillar of the cloud. On the day the tabernacle was completed and erected, the cloud settled over it (*see Numbers 9*). The cloud provided the signal when to stop moving and when to get going again. Certainly Hobab couldn't compete with the cloud in knowing the best spots to camp, could he? Or maybe Hobab's knowledge of the area was simply meant to complement the Lord's leading; that is, to show them certain things about the area that might be helpful to them as they followed the cloud.

What are some decisions you need to make soon? As you plan, ask yourself, *What are my motives?* After thinking about those motives, might you need to change your plans? Is doing the right thing for the wrong reason still doing the "right" thing?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Aged Parents,” pp. 360–364, in *The Adventist Home*.

“Though not an Israelite, Zipporah was a worshiper of the true God. She was of a timid, retiring disposition, gentle and affectionate, and greatly distressed at the sight of suffering; and it was for this reason that Moses, when on the way to Egypt, had consented to her return to Midian. He desired to spare her the pain of witnessing the judgments that were to fall on the Egyptians.

“When Zipporah rejoined her husband in the wilderness, she saw that his burdens were wearing away his strength, and she made known her fears to Jethro, who suggested measures for his relief. Here was the chief reason for Miriam’s antipathy to Zipporah. Smarting under the supposed neglect shown to herself and Aaron, she regarded the wife of Moses as the cause, concluding that her influence had prevented him from taking them into his counsels as formerly.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 383, 384.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What kind of prejudices are prevalent in your own society? Ethnic, religious, national, gender, economic? What have been the baneful results? How can we learn to recognize prejudice in ourselves? Most important, what can we do to help purge this from society, the church, and ourselves? As a class, what can you do to help alleviate the suffering of others brought about by prejudice?
- ❷ As we saw earlier, the daughters of Jethro initially believed that Moses was an Egyptian. This shows the power of culture over our lives. What culture are you living in? How does it impact your faith? As a class, talk about the things in your culture that jive well with your faith and the things that are in conflict with it. Identify together some of the problem areas and then talk about whatever things you can do to help yourselves and other church members work through these challenges.

Summary: When Zipporah married Moses, she had no idea what was coming. Yet, from the little said about her, we can see that she and her family were a blessing to Moses and a great help in his divine mission.

Watching God Work: Part 2

Maria left the room wondering whether her refusal to serve the men alcohol would mean the end of her employment. She prayed and left the results to God.

A little while later her boss's brother called her back into the room where the family was gathered. "I thought you were a religious fanatic," he said. "But I went on the Internet and found that Seventh-day Adventist Christians are a well-known group. The Web site explains why you keep Sabbath instead of Sunday, and why you do not drink or smoke." He smiled and said, "You made us feel ashamed because we are Muslims, and we should follow these principles, but we don't. You are so different from other Christians we have met. I want to learn more about your religion."

Maria smiled. God had blessed her efforts to share her faith and brought glory to His name, even though she could not explain her reasons in their language.

"God has allowed us Adventist Christians to be in this country for such a time as this," Maria says. "One day it may not be possible to witness to these important people, but what we share with them now will stay with them." Hundreds of families in this country are learning about what Adventists believe right in their own homes.

One day Maria's boss brought her a piece of meat and asked her to cook it for him. She realized it was pork and gently told him that it was unclean and she would not touch it. He was surprised and asked her, "How do you know that this meat is not good to eat?" Maria's language was too limited to explain what she knew, so she pulled a Bible from her bag and turned to Leviticus 11 and asked the man to read the passage. As he read the chapter, she explained that this book is part of the Torah, which Muslims recognize as part of their holy writings. Her boss and his wife read it together and found other things they should observe. They talked together, and she later heard him say, "These Adventists are more Muslims than we are."

Maria knows that she has more than a job; she has a mission to share God's love and His promises with people she meets, people who say they believe but know nothing about their beliefs. "Every action, every step we take, shows in whom we believe," she explains. "Every day is a testimony of God's love."

Our mission offerings help supply materials that make it possible to share God's love with all people.

MARIA lives and shares her faith in a large city in the Middle East.

Samson *and* His Women: The Folly of Passion



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Judges 14–16.*

Memory Text: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

The story of Samson presents many challenges to the modern reader. A lot of things just seem hard to understand, which only goes to show that, as Paul said, we see through “a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Only after Jesus returns will we get the full picture.

Nevertheless, even through a “glass darkly” there’s enough there for us to learn a few good lessons from the rather sordid story of Samson and his wife and Delilah.

Delilah was never the wife of Samson, but there are many similarities in the experience Samson had with the woman he had married earlier and with Delilah, the woman he later fell in love with. (1) Both were Philistines. (2) Both were approached successfully by the Philistine elders to snare Samson. (3) The attempts of both were resisted by Samson initially, but in the end he yielded to both. Though he did not marry Delilah, it is her name, rather than that of his nameless wife, that has become associated with Samson.

The Week at a Glance: Samson was a man given great gifts and a calling from the Lord. He was also a man of great passions. It’s a sad story of how these conflicted.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 11.*

The Call of Samson

Read Judges 13. What evidence did Manoah and his wife have of the special calling given them? What conditions came with that calling?

Judges 13 makes it very clear that Samson was to have a great role in Israel, that God planned to use this man to do a special work, to begin to “deliver” Israel from the Philistines (*Judg. 13:5*). The Hebrew word for “deliver” comes from a root word, *ysha*, from which the name “Jesus” and the Hebrew word for “Savior,” *Moshiah*, arises.

Samson obviously had a great calling. Of course, being called of God doesn’t make the one called infallible, or free of sin.

Read Judges 13:24, 25. What do these texts tell us about Samson?

Read Judges 14:1–3 and 16:1. What do these texts tell us about Samson?

Whatever his great calling, Samson showed some dangerous character weaknesses. Samson’s emotions were guided purely by physical appearances. The first time he said to his parents, “ ‘I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife’ ” (*Judg. 14:1, 2, NIV*). Later he saw a prostitute in Gaza and went to spend the night with her (*Judg. 16:1*). At a time when he should have been concentrating on the special mission, at a time when he should have been true to God, he let his passions get control over him, and he then linked himself in an intimate way with the enemies of Israel. How ironic! He’s called to “deliver” Israel from the Philistines, and the next thing we know, he’s marrying one.

What has God “called” you to do? What weaknesses of character are standing in your way of fulfilling that calling? What promises can you claim from the Bible for the victories that will enable you to do whatever God has called you to do?

Samson's Wedding Day

Read Judges 14. What mistakes are we seeing Samson make?

Samson, apparently, frequented the Philistine towns west of his home. He also had no second thoughts, it seems, about forming alliances with the women who caught his fancy there. The Israelites looked down on the Philistines and used the word *uncircumcised* as synonymous with *heathen* (*1 Sam. 14:6*), even though the Philistines were their rulers at the time (*Judg. 14:4*). The alliances of Samson with non-Israelite women no doubt caused his parents a lot of concern, especially considering the special circumstances of his birth and calling (*vss. 3, 4*).

Also, from the time before the Flood, godly men had been attracted by beautiful ungodly women and lapsed into wickedness (*Gen. 6:1–5*). Solomon, too, married many foreign wives who worshiped other gods. They were from nations specifically banned by God (*1 Kings 11:1, 2*). These alliances were not just political: Solomon is recorded as “ [holding] fast to them in love ” (*vs. 2, NIV*). While these wives turned his heart to other gods, Solomon still worshiped Yahweh, though not wholeheartedly (*1 Kings 11:4–6*).

What do the actions of the Philistines say about the nature of those people with whom Samson was uniting?

What we see here is an example of just how dangerous the wrong influences can be. Take someone with inherent weakness and place that person—regardless of his or her divine calling—in a bad environment, and the results can be very painful for everyone.

Look carefully and prayerfully at the influences around you, at least the ones you can control. Are they aiding you in your spiritual life, or are they working against it? What changes must you make?

Samson's Revenge

This marriage seemed to go from bad to worse. Though Samson's wife "betrayed" him, it's not hard to understand her fear. After all, look at what her own kinsmen threatened to do to her and her family (*Judg. 14:15*). Perhaps she should have told Samson what happened and asked for his help and protection. Either way, this ill-advised marriage didn't last long. Samson's anger and then abandonment of his wife set the stage for the suffering that was to come.

What reason is given for Samson's return to his wife? *Judg. 15:1*.
What does this tell us about Samson?

However much one would like to put the best spin on Samson's motives, the text seems to indicate that he was moved more by his lust than by any desire for marital reconciliation. Whatever his motives, he obviously wasn't too pleased to discover that his wife had been married off to another. Marriage seems about as corrupted back then as it is today.

What did Samson's responses here tell us about his character? *Judges 15*.

Obviously, as shown by his actions after his wife was married to another man, Samson had a violent temper. And maybe, too, he really loved his wife and was angered that she was with another man.

Next, his killing of Philistines might have come also out of love for his wife; or maybe he acted out of guilt, believing that his burning of the field led to their murder. Whatever the reasons, a great deal of suffering that could have been avoided occurred because Samson, who should have known better, allowed his emotions and passions to rule.

Samson, angry at his wife, walks out right away. Imagine, however, if he would have shown her some mercy, grace, and forgiveness. How different things might have been. Spend time at the foot of the Cross, and from that understand the forgiveness granted you through Jesus. Now, apply that same forgiveness to the next person who angers you.

The Sad Saga Continues

Judges 15 ended with Samson killing one thousand Philistines. “After his victory,” wrote Ellen White, “the Israelites made Samson judge, and he ruled Israel for twenty years.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 564. Here we see how Samson was to “begin” to deliver Israel (*Judg. 13:5*).

Read Judges 16:1–3. What other leaders in the Bible, despite having great privileges, showed similar weaknesses? What was the cost?

His going to a prostitute was bad enough, but arrogantly going to one in the middle of his enemies? “But not withstanding his sin, God’s mercy had not forsaken him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 565. Samson escaped with his life. But would he learn his lesson?

Read Judges 16:4–6. What does this tell us about the kind of relationship he entered into again?

Unlike the other women he was with, including his wife (at least the one mentioned in Scripture), it says that he loved Delilah. It doesn’t seem, however, that the love was reciprocated.

Read Judges 16:5–20. What does this story tell us about the power of love to blind the eyes? What should have been apparent to Samson from the beginning? Why didn’t he see it?

However foolish it was on his part to get involved with another Philistine woman, he should have seen early on that this woman was not out for his good. So strong, though, was the power of “love” and passion that he persisted in keeping up the relationship, despite how obvious it was that he should have fled right from the start.

How carefully do you guard your emotions and your passions? How many “good” people ruin their lives and the lives of their loved ones by not controlling the emotions? What’s the best way to protect yourself from this trap?

Blinded by Love

Read Judges 16:16–31. If you could derive a moral from this story, one that would be relevant for us today, what would it be, and why?

God made men and women as He did and ordained them to be married as a symbol of the unity and closeness He seeks with His church (*Rev. 21:2*). The ideal relationship should bring each partner closer to God, not drive one or the other away. In this case we can see so clearly how a wrong relationship can separate someone from the Lord.

“What a change to him who had been the judge and champion of Israel!—now weak, blind, imprisoned, degraded to the most menial service! Little by little he had violated the conditions of his sacred calling. God had borne long with him; but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, the Lord departed from him. There was no virtue in his long hair merely, but it was a token of his loyalty to God; and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 566.

What irony is found in the fact that Samson was blinded?

In reading the story, we can see that Samson, regardless of the mistakes he had made, hadn't lost his faith, however imperfect that faith was. And God was still able to use Samson to accomplish His goals. How much better, though, would it have been if Samson had been faithful to the truth he knew. That God was able to accomplish His purposes despite Samson's failures doesn't justify those failures. It shows only that God works His will despite us; how much better if He would work His will through us.

Samson is listed in Hebrews 11:32 as a faithful follower of the Lord. What does it tell us about God's grace? What hope can you draw from this for yourself?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “True Love or Infatuation,” pp. 50–54, in *The Adventist Home*.

“The narrative creates an impression of almost incredible stupidity on the part of Samson. At any time he could have put an end to Delilah’s questioning by leaving her and returning to his home. But Samson’s chief fault was not so much stupidity as sensual infatuation. In the ruin and shame that this sensual weakness brought upon him, and the way in which, step by step, it led him to forfeit God’s miraculous gift of supernatural strength, lies the chief moral of the story.” —*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 398.

“God’s providential care had been over Samson, that he might be prepared to accomplish the work which he was called to do. At the very outset of life he was surrounded with favorable conditions for physical strength, intellectual vigor, and moral purity. But under the influence of wicked associates he let go that hold upon God which is man’s only safeguard, and he was swept away by the tide of evil. Those who in the way of duty are brought into trial may be sure that God will preserve them; but if men willfully place themselves under the power of temptation, they will fall, sooner or later.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 568.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What can you do to help someone who seems to be allowing his or her passions to overrule better spiritual judgment?
- ❷ What can you do as a church to give folk who are being tempted the help and encouragement of a strong, loving, and understanding congregation? What changes need to occur in the church so that those who need help can find people who care and understand, as opposed to those who will condemn and judge them?
- ❸ As a class, take time together to pray for your church leaders, those given great responsibilities, that they will be protected from making the same kind of mistakes that Samson made.

Summary: Samson’s story is of a strong man brought down by his moral weaknesses. A strong relationship with his God would have helped him control his relationship with women. His experience illustrates the text “Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers” (*2 Cor. 6:14, NKJV*).

The Journey of Faith

by CARMELO GONZALEZ

As a member of another denomination, I loved attending church and Sunday School. I taught the youth class, and my wife, Doris, taught the children. We were a happy Christian family. I loved God, and I wanted to serve Him. Then doubts began creeping into my mind. I wondered whether my beliefs were really based on the Bible.

As I thought about what I believed, I found more and more things that did not seem to follow what the Bible teaches. I asked my pastor about some of these issues, but I was not satisfied with his answers.

A week later, my sister called to tell me she had attended a religious seminar and was amazed by the preaching. I was interested and asked her to send me a cassette tape of the seminar. When it arrived, I eagerly listened to it. The speaker talked about the statue in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and what it meant. This speaker was good, but so much of what he said seemed—well, strange. I jotted down the Bible texts so that I could look them up later. I started looking up every Bible reference, and I could hardly believe it. Every Bible text seemed to prove the man's words true.

I called my sister and asked her to send me more tapes. Soon I received a box containing 30 tapes. As I listened to them, I wondered, *Are these tapes God's answer to my prayer for truth?* I knew that the speaker was a Seventh-day Adventist, and I knew a little bit about Adventists. But I did not know anyone who was an Adventist.

I called the telephone operator and asked for the number of an Adventist church in my area. I called the church and left a message.

The next day a young pastor called and invited me to attend prayer meeting on Wednesday night in a nearby church. I went, and immediately the members made me feel welcome and comfortable.

The next day the pastor called again and told me of an Adventist church closer to our home and suggested I visit there. This little group made me feel very welcome. My family and I started attending the little Adventist church together. We quickly made friends with members of the congregation and decided that God had led us to this church.

I have been a Christian for many years, but now I am the happiest Christian, for I have found the truth of God in a loving new family.

CARMELO GONZALEZ *and his family live in Ponce, Puerto Rico.*



Churches in West-Central Africa

Leaving our canoe we wind through a simple village of small reed houses on stilts. Children play in the dirt, pigs and goats nuzzle in piles of trash. Approaching a humble reed building near the edge of town, we hear the singing inside. Up the narrow ladder of sticks we climb, and into a roomful of smiling faces. Half of them are under 12 years old, all of them are Seventh-day Adventist brothers and sisters.

Witchcraft permeates this area of Benin in western Africa. Becoming an Adventist Christian often means separation from families and community. Loved ones and trusted friends urge believers in Christ to see the shaman priest for "juju," magic to cure their problem. It is so difficult to face such strong opposition and stand true to a God they cannot see.

But these beautiful believers continue on, continue to reach out as a light into darkness. They are in desperate need of a new church building, not made of sticks and reeds, but one built as strong as their faith. I see their dedication, I see the challenges they face, and I want to help them. For me, it's personal.

[This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide 10 congregations in West-Central Africa with churches or evangelistic centers.]

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Boaz *and* Ruth: Firm Foundations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ruth 1–4*

Memory Text: “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried,” (*Ruth 1:16, 17, NIV*).

From the Fall in Eden to the mark of the beast at the end of the world, Scripture portrays a pretty grim picture of humanity. The Word of God does not gloss over the human condition. From one end of the Bible to the other, humanity is portrayed for what it is.

In the midst of all this sits the book of Ruth and the handful of characters there, people of courage, conviction, faith, loyalty, and selflessness. Where did these folk come from?

The refreshing relationship of Boaz and Ruth appears in stark contrast to the period of the judges in which the story is set, a time when there was no king and everybody did what they wanted. Yet Ruth, a Moabite, demonstrates supreme devotion to her bereaved mother-in-law and to the God of the Israelites; Boaz, meanwhile, shows consistent goodness. Though life had thrown so many hurdles in the way, the story of Ruth illustrates how a right attitude can overcome odds.

The Week at a Glance: In Boaz and Ruth we can see many features that make a good foundation for a successful marriage and for a faithful life in general.

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

Family Affairs

Sometimes we can find goodness, faith, dedication, and selflessness in the most unexpected places. The family relations shown in the book of Ruth could have easily gone sour. Instead, they give us something to emulate.

Read Ruth 1 and, based on what you read, answer the following questions:

1. What parallel is found here with some earlier Bible characters?

Ruth 1:1; compare with Gen. 12:10, 26:1.

2. What evidence of the good family relations between everyone involved do you find in Ruth 1? How were these good relations manifested?

3. Read Naomi's words in Ruth 1:8, 15, 20, 21. What do these texts tell us about her?

This must have been some kind of family: a Hebrew mother-in-law to two "pagan" daughters-in-law wouldn't, on the surface, seem to form a great relationship. It had all the earmarks for disaster.

And yet, the dedication to each other's well-being is phenomenal. We don't know all that went on in their homes, but they obviously had something that many homes certainly could use.

How faithful and loyal are you to those around you? What can you do in order to think less of self and more about the good of others?

Devotion of Ruth

Based on Ruth 1, what can we know about the character of Ruth? What evidence do we have that she believed in the God of Israel?

Ruth's dedication to her mother-in-law was powerful. Orpah's turning back possibly made Ruth's decision to stick by her mother-in-law more difficult. Naomi pointed to her and said, " [She's] going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her' " (*Ruth 1:15, NIV*). That is when Ruth made her famous statement about wanting to be part of the people of Israel. Obviously, she saw something in those people and in their God that attracted her. All this despite the fact that Naomi herself doesn't appear to be an openly aggressive evangelist.

What evidence do we see here of just how, on one level, Naomi wasn't a good witness for the Lord?

Regardless of the problems, in Ruth we see a Moabite who sought to be part of Israel, even though the Israelites were to be more accepting of Edomites and Egyptians than of Moabites. Edomite and Egyptian great-grandchildren (the third generation) might be allowed into the assembly of the Lord (*Deut. 23:7, 8*). But no descendant of any Ammonite or Moabite could enter the Lord's assembly, even down to the tenth generation (*vs. 3*). However, this is not a prohibition against ever marrying one of them, nor is it an exclusion of them from salvation. Ruth adopts Naomi's God as her very own, and in return God shows her His favor in many ways.

Look at your own life, your own church, your own relationships to others and to the Lord. What, if anything, is there that would cause others to be drawn to your church and to your God? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your church? Discuss your response in class on Sabbath.

Boaz

So far we've seen numerous things in Ruth that show her to be a person of good character, faithfulness, and dedication.

But, as we know, it takes two to make a couple. Hence, Boaz now enters the story.

Read Ruth 2:1–12. What can we learn here about the character of Boaz? What points stand out about him?

When Boaz found out who the young woman gleaning in his fields was, he did several thoughtful things. He (1) gave her full encouragement to glean in his fields, (2) provided for her peace of mind by informing her that the men had been instructed not to bother her, (3) provided for her further needs by making his drinking water available for her, and (4) gave her spiritual encouragement.

Read James 2:14–17. In what ways do we see the principles James expressed manifested here by Boaz? What lesson is in here for us?

Boaz further tried not to make Ruth feel as if she were a beggar (*Ruth 2:13–23*). At mealtime he invited her to join his harvesters for bread and a relish made with vinegar and even gave her enough roasted grain so that there were leftovers. He instructed his men not to embarrass her even if she gleaned among the tied sheaves, and he even told them to deliberately remove stalks of grain from the sheaves and leave them for her. The amount that Ruth took home was more than could be gained through hard work. It testified to generosity. Finally, Boaz invited her to spend the rest of the harvest days in his fields.

How often a kind word can make such a difference in a person's life! How quick are you to give praise and affirmation to those around you? Be stingy with criticism; be generous in affirmation.

The Proposal

Read Ruth 3. What noble traits of character are revealed in all the actions of the people involved? In what ways were these traits revealed in the life of Jesus?

If there's one thing about the Bible that should be clear to us, it is that it takes place in a cultural context. Whatever the grand and eternal truths God teaches us through His Word, they come to us through people who live and function in their own culture—a culture that at times can seem very strange to those who live in other cultures.

What cultural things are revealed in this chapter that are strange to your own culture?

Though it was in the darkness of the night, the proposal had the potential to be very embarrassing for Ruth. She could have been spied by someone, and stories might have spread. Boaz might have refused her request. But Boaz immediately showed his thoughtfulness by trying to put her at ease. He acted as though she was doing him a favor by choosing him instead of some younger man. He then promised to do all that she asked. Finally, he sent her back to Naomi laden with food. He also went out of his way to protect her from any false accusations that might have come from her visit to him.

Go back through Ruth 3 again and look at the different character traits revealed there by Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. How well do you manifest these traits in your own life? What upcoming issues and challenges are you facing in which you need to manifest these same traits? Take some time to think through what's coming and how you can, through the grace of God, do the right thing.

Redemption

Read Ruth 4. What ultimately came of this marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew?

Redemption is perhaps the most important theme in the book of Ruth. In various forms the Hebrew word occurs more than twenty-three times in these four chapters. Boaz fulfills the role of redeemer for Naomi and her deceased husband and son. David, the notable descendant, later proved to be the redeemer of Israel's fortunes lost after Joshua; and Jesus, a further descendant, provided redemption for the entire humanity (*Gal. 4:5, 1 Pet. 1:18, Rev. 5:9*).

What were the duties of a kinsman-redeemer? *Lev. 25:25, 47–49; Num. 35:18, 19; Deut. 25:5, 6.*

The custom of a male relative marrying the deceased's widow to raise up an inheritance existed in other countries of the ancient Near East. Deuteronomy 25:5 specifies that in Israel this practice applied just to brothers living together. Judah attempted to get his second son to follow this practice. Boaz did not qualify under the provisions of Deuteronomy 25, but it is apparent that extensions of this principle were practiced, and in order of nearness of kin.

Naomi had not sold family property, but if and when it did go up for sale, the closest relatives would have first option to buy it so as to keep it in the family. The kinsman who would redeem this also had the obligation to marry Ruth to provide an heir for Mahlon, her deceased husband.

The fulfilling of the role of redeemer had its risk. If the kinsman-redeemer had only one child, and that by Ruth, his own property would pass on in the name of Mahlon. Hence, the law allowed the nearest kin the opportunity to refuse to do what was expected of him. However, the one who refused to redeem his relative's property and name had to undergo a humiliating ceremony (*see Deut. 25:7–10*).

As said earlier, the Bible unfolds within a particular cultural context that can often be hard for those in other cultures to understand fully. All that being said, what universal principles regarding family obligations that should apply to us and our family relationships can we find here? How well are you fulfilling those obligations?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Compatibility,” pp. 83–86, in *The Adventist Home*.

In the beginning of the story, the odds of Ruth ending up marrying Boaz were indeed minuscule. Many “circumstantial” events were necessary to lead to their eventual meeting and marriage. (1) There had to be a famine in Judah, else the family of Elimelech would not have left Bethlehem. (2) They had to choose Moab rather than some other country for refuge, such as Egypt or Edom, in order to come in contact with Ruth. (3) There had to be eligible bachelors in Naomi’s family to marry Ruth. (4) The male had to die in order for Ruth to be eligible for a second marriage. (5) The famine in Judah had to end so that Naomi could consider going back. (6) Ruth had to decide to accompany Naomi. (7) Ruth had to happen to glean in the field of Boaz.

In the end, the Bible consistently presents the picture that the hand of God is over all and that all that happens is with divine foreknowledge. For those who love God and put Him first, all things work together for their ultimate good (*Rom. 8:28*). This story is indeed a great example of that principle.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Look at Naomi’s reaction in Ruth 1:19–21. Compare it to her words in Ruth 2:20. Why is this such a common reaction? What’s wrong, however, with her “theology”?
- ❷ As a class, discuss your answers to Tuesday’s last question. What do your answers tell you about yourself and your church? What things in your church would draw people to it? What things would push people away? What practical things need to be changed in order to make your church something that would draw others to it and to the God you represent? How can you as a class help to start implementing the needed changes?
- ❸ As a class, talk about your own culture and how it deals with family relationships. What things in your culture work toward strengthening those relationships? What things work against it? What can you do to help others better understand their obligations to family members?

Summary: Despite some aspects of their situation not being ideal for marriage, Boaz and Ruth had the essential qualities for a solid relationship. Both demonstrated a spirit of caring and sharing, and both were deeply committed to God.

No Matter What

How much does your faith mean to you? To James Cherogony of Kenya, it means everything. And though he is just 20 years old, already his faith has cost him 3 years of his life.

James was a top student at a secondary school in Kenya when a fellow student introduced James to the Seventh-day Adventist faith. James joined his friend in worship and soon gave his life to the Lord.

As graduation neared, the students prepared for the national exams. To score well on these exams meant a chance to study at a quality university and prepare for the future. James was not sure what he would study. He could excel in a number of areas.

But when exam dates were posted, two of his exams fell on the Sabbath. He went to the headmaster and explained that he was a Seventh-day Adventist and would not take the exams on Sabbath. But instead of helping him, the school suspended him. When James's parents learned what had happened, they were angry. They refused to intervene with the school to help James take the last two exams.

James had completed every requirement for graduation except those two exams, but now he would have to repeat at least a year of high school and retake the exams in order to graduate. But his parents refused to pay for another year of tuition. For two years James stayed at home, working to help the family, reading widely, writing letters, and seeking to find a secondary school that did not require Sabbath class attendance or Sabbath exams.

Then James learned of an Adventist secondary school attached to the Adventist-owned University of Eastern Africa in Baraton, Kenya. There he could complete his studies and take his exams. Thrilled, James applied for admission and was accepted. Government regulations made James repeat more than his final year of secondary school, but James is not deterred.

Through his trials, James has remained a faithful Seventh-day Adventist Christian, letting his faith shine as a light to his family and friends. His parents have seen how much James's faith means to him, and they no longer trouble him about the missed exams and lost years.

James is determined that no matter what, he will not give up his faith in God. Your mission offerings help young people such as James receive the education they need in an environment that affirms and strengthens their faith.

JAMES CHEROGONY lives in Kenya. He is completing his secondary school and hopes to study toward a career of service to God.

Elkanah *and* Hannah: Fulfilling a VOW



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Sam. 1:1–2:26.*

Memory Text: “There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God” (*1 Samuel 2:2*).

Usually children are known by who their parents are; sometimes, though, parents are known by their children. Such is the case with Elkanah and Hannah. This couple did nothing extraordinary except create Samuel. They were neither the first ones nor the last ones to acquire a child after a prolonged period of anxiety and prayer. Were it not for the child, these two—however faithful to the Lord—most likely would have passed away into obscurity, known now only to God and the angels. But the remarkable child Samuel caused the memory of Elkanah and Hannah to be preserved in the sacred Scriptures, and so this couple, though dead, still speak to us today.

Most of the couples for study this quarter involve husbands who were either patriarchs, prophets, or rulers, whom most of us aren't. But we can all be like Elkanah and Hannah. We may not have as distinguished a child, but we can show the same dedication and thus perhaps bring the extraordinary out of the ordinary.

The Week at a Glance: We can find in the story of Elkanah and Hannah a faithful couple whom the Lord was able to use in a remarkable way. What can we learn from their example?

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

Elkanah

Read 1 Samuel 1. From what's found in this text, what can we gather about the character of Elkanah?

“The father of Samuel was Elkanah, a Levite, who dwelt at Ramah, in Mount Ephraim. He was a person of wealth and influence, a kind husband, and a man who feared and revered God.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*[®] (Oct. 27, 1881), vol. 7, no. 40.

Though not much is said about Elkanah, and he's somewhat in the background of this story, a few points do emerge. He truly seemed to love Hannah and did what he could to console her in her grief. He also seemed to be a devout person, one who sought to obey the Lord.

“Although his services were not required at the sanctuary, yet, like many another Levite during the period of the judges (*Judges 17:8, 9*), Elkanah went up as a common Israelite with his own sacrifices to encourage his neighbors and set them a good example. Though he lived in the midst of an evil environment, his spirituality was evidently at a high level. Even though Hophni and Phinehas were corrupt, Elkanah was faithful in his worship and in the offering of his sacrifices.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 455.

Perhaps what's most impressive about Elkanah was in regard to Hannah's vow. After all, that was his own son she was giving to the Lord. It certainly wouldn't have been an easy thing for him to do, as well.

How did Elkanah respond to Hannah's vow before the Lord? Did he have the right to void that vow? See *Num. 30:1–15*.

Ask yourself, What aspects of Elkanah's character could I better emulate in my own personal relations and in my relationship with the Lord?

The Marriage

As we saw yesterday, Elkanah was apparently a faithful follower of the Lord. Yet, that faithfulness didn't prevent him from deviating from God's ideal in marriage, one man and one wife. That polygamy was permitted didn't make it right—or good. God has given us an ideal because He knows what's best for us. When we depart from it, no good can arise.

According to Ellen White, Hannah was Elkanah's first wife. When she didn't produce offspring, he took another wife. "But this step, prompted by a lack of faith in God, did not bring happiness. Sons and daughters were added to the household; but the joy and beauty of God's sacred institution had been marred and the peace of the family was broken. Peninnah, the new wife, was jealous and narrow-minded, and she bore herself with pride and insolence. To Hannah, hope seemed crushed and life a weary burden. . . ."—Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God*, p. 39.

What examples of lapses of faith and judgment can you find in other Bible “heroes”? What were those lapses, and what were the consequences?

As we all should know, thanks to Jesus, in whom we have “forgiveness of sins” (*Col. 1:14; see also Exod. 34:7, Ps. 130:4, Eph. 1:7*), even our worst deeds have been atoned for. But the worse the deed, the worse the consequences, usually. We might be given the promise of forgiveness for our sins, but the Bible doesn't promise freedom from the immediate consequences of those sins. And even, as in the case of Elkanah, if we do something that isn't expressly forbidden, we can still reap bitter consequences by deviating from principle. Thus, we mustn't fool ourselves with our own “piety” and “faithfulness.” Even the best among us are not immune to lapses in faith and good judgment.

Think of a few examples in your own life in which lack of faith or a simple lapse of good judgment brought choices that reaped bad consequences. What lessons did you learn that could help you from making the same mistakes again?

Hannah's Vow

What were the two problems that Hannah faced? (*1 Sam. 1:1, 6*).

Hannah means something like “the graceful one,” and *Peninnah* is similar to “the fertile one.” How prophetic sometimes names turn out to be! The Bible does not say that Elkanah loved Hannah more, but we do get that impression. However, it is Peninnah who provided him with children. Hannah’s problem is not only that she has no sons but that Peninnah has several.

Elkanah and his family journeyed to the sanctuary annually (*1 Sam. 1:3*). What festivals were all Israelite males required to attend? (*Exod. 23:14–19*).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The most festive of these was the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Ingathering, and it is probably to this that Elkanah took his family with him. But even if it was a personal family pilgrimage, it would have been a happy occasion. In spite of all the joy and gaiety, or maybe because of it, Hannah became despondent. More so because Peninnah took pleasure in provoking her (*1 Sam. 1:7*).

What was the nature of Hannah’s vow? What assurance did she have that the Lord heard her prayer?

The Bible makes it clear that God intervened (*1 Sam. 1:19*), and Hannah conceived a son. At the same time, too, the influence of emotions on the body can be powerful. After Eli spoke with her (*vs. 17*), there was a change in her whole demeanor. Whereas before she refused to eat, now she ate; whereas before she looked sad, now her countenance was changed. Verse 19 states that they, meaning at least her and her husband, rose up early and worshiped before the Lord. The next thing we are told, she conceives, and not just a child but a male, as well.

We might not always have such a clear answer to our prayers, but what Bible promises can you lean on that help you trust in the Lord’s goodness and care, promises that should give you the kind of peace Hannah experienced?

Hannah, Mother in Israel

Hannah named her son Samuel, which sounds like the Hebrew for “God heard,” but which is related to “asked of God.” Hannah explains the name: “ ‘Because I asked the Lord for him’ ” (1 Sam. 1:20, NIV). Not wishing to go to the tabernacle until she could carry out her vow and leave her son there, she waited until she had weaned him. In the absence of refrigeration to keep milk fresh, this was perhaps as long as three years.

“From the earliest dawn of intellect [Hannah] had taught her son to love and reverence God and to regard himself as the Lord’s. By every familiar object surrounding him she had sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. When separated from her child, the faithful mother’s solicitude did not cease. Every day he was the subject of her prayers. Every year she made, with her own hands, a robe of service for him; and as she went up with her husband to worship at Shiloh, she gave the child this reminder of her love. Every fiber of the little garment had been woven with a prayer that he might be pure, noble, and true. She did not ask for her son worldly greatness, but she earnestly pleaded that he might attain that greatness which Heaven values—that he might honor God and bless his fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 572.

After the child was born and weaned, Hannah fulfilled her vow to the Lord and brought him to Eli. Hannah expected Eli, with a little prompting, to remember the incident that had taken place. At that time Eli had told her, without knowing her petition, “ ‘May the God of Israel grant you what you have asked’ ” (1 Sam. 1:17, NIV). Now Hannah reminds him, “ ‘I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him’ ” (vs. 27, NIV). How easy it might have been for her to forget the vow, to rationalize away all the reasons for fulfilling it. After all, this was her only child!

What reasons could Hannah have used to justify not fulfilling the vow?

Read Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1–11. What does it tell us about the nature and character of God? What specific elements mean the most to you right now, in whatever personal situations you are facing? How can you make these words your own?

The Family Legacy

As we saw earlier, none of this could have happened had not Elkanah agreed. Hannah, obviously, told him what she vowed; he, too, was witness to the miracle and, as a man of God, agreed to go along. That he did was a testimony to his faith as well.

Read again 1 Samuel 1:23. There are three elements to Elkanah’s words. What words show his concern for the happiness of his wife? What words show his concern for his son? What words show his desire that they be faithful to the Lord?

While giving up the child would have been hard in the best of circumstances, another element that only complicated things, making the decision even harder to fulfill, enters into the picture.

Read 1 Samuel 2:12–26. What kind of moral environment was Samuel going to be subjected to? How could this have been used as another reason not to fulfill the vow?

Regardless of that problem, this faithful husband and wife went ahead and gave the child over. Obviously they had to trust in the Lord, no matter how hard it might have been at times. The Lord rewarded that faithfulness (*see 1 Sam. 2:20*). After leaving Samuel at the tabernacle, Hannah gave birth to five more children (*1 Sam. 2:21*). The couple themselves do not appear again in the Bible. As far as they are concerned, the story is over. But, of course, it’s not. Through their faithfulness a great leader in Israel arose. Truly they are an example of the principle found in words written long after they were gone: “ ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord’ ” for “ ‘their deeds will follow them’ ” (*Rev. 14:13, NIV*).

Were you to “die in the Lord” today, what deeds would follow you? What does your answer tell you about how you’re living your life? What changes might you consider making?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Heaven’s Estimate of Children,” p. 279, in *The Adventist Home*.

“What a reward was Hannah’s! and what an encouragement to faithfulness is her example! There are opportunities of inestimable worth, interests infinitely precious, committed to every mother. The humble round of duties which women have come to regard as a wearisome task should be looked upon as a grand and noble work. It is the mother’s privilege to bless the world by her influence, and in doing this she will bring joy to her own heart. She may make straight paths for the feet of her children, through sunshine and shadow, to the glorious heights above. But it is only when she seeks, in her own life, to follow the teachings of Christ that the mother can hope to form the character of her children after the divine pattern. The world teems with corrupting influences. Fashion and custom exert a strong power over the young. If the mother fails in her duty to instruct, guide, and restrain, her children will naturally accept the evil, and turn from the good. Let every mother go often to her Saviour with the prayer, ‘Teach us, how shall we order the child, and what shall we do unto him?’”
—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 572, 573.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ This story is a nice example of a faithful couple being rewarded for their fidelity. What about cases in which, it seems, faithful people aren’t rewarded, at least now in what appears to be in any tangible way? As a class, talk about such cases. What answers do you have?
- ❷ So many people have been so terribly damaged by a poor upbringing. What promises and hope can you offer to someone who struggles in overcoming the damage done to them in childhood?
- ❸ We all know stories of faithful parents who, though doing their best to raise their children right, suffer terribly when those children leave the faith. Talk frankly about this situation. What encouragement and hope can you share with each other?

Summary: Common people were made uncommon by their dedication to God. Hannah’s vow was unusual, but she carried it out, and God blessed her and her husband, Elkanah, for it.

Just Pray!

by CLYDE VILLAN

“Help! Help!” The mournful cries awakened me in the night. They came from the forest near our mountain cottage, where my partner and I teach in a mission school. I awakened my teaching partner, grabbed my flashlight, and ran toward the voice.

“Teacher, help!” came the cry again. We found the victim, Datu (Chief) Campilan, lying in a pool of blood, too weak to crawl any farther. His left leg was pierced through by a pointed bamboo stick used to capture wild boar or deer.

I shouted for help, and the villagers came running. But when they saw their chief, they refused to touch him or come close to him. “What is wrong?” I asked. “Why are you afraid to help our chief?” But no one answered.

My teaching partner and I prepared to carry the datu to our cottage, but he said, “Just pray, Maestro. I believe that your God is powerful.”

I told the chief to close his eyes and nodded to my partner to hold the datu’s leg. Without warning I pulled the bamboo stick from his leg. He cried out in pain, but the stake was out. I tied the wound with a clean cloth to stop the bleeding, and we carried him to our cottage. There we washed his wound and applied a poultice of charcoal.

I told him that we must take him to the hospital the next day, for we did not have the medicines to treat him. But the chief refused. “If I die, I will die in my own village,” he said.

Then I remembered a lecture from our missionary training. These people believe that if someone dies in your care, the dead person’s soul will demand that you join him on the journey to the next world. In other words, if the datu died, we would be killed. No wonder no one would touch the chief in the forest.

But Datu Campilan’s faith was strong. “You just pray, Maestro, and your God will heal me.” We prayed all night. The next morning I ran to town to buy antibiotics. We continued to treat Datu Campilan, and with each treatment we prayed for God’s healing power.

God healed Datu Campilan. He shows his scar and tells his villagers that the God of the missionary teachers is a powerful, healing God.

CLYDE VILLAN was a student missionary in Sil-angon Mission School when he wrote this story. He studies at Mountain View College in southern Philippines.

The Jobs: Living *With* Losses



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 1:1–2:10.*

Memory Text: “He replied, ‘You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?’” (*Job 2:10, NIV*).

The nature of the book of Job, similar to what’s called Wisdom literature, and the names of the characters in the story suggest an Edomite setting. The closest we can get to a name in the Bible similar to Job’s is an Edomite king, Jobab (*Gen. 36:33*).

Job’s wife’s name isn’t given. In fact, not much is said about her at all. In the whole Bible, she’s quoted in only one verse, and based upon that quote—uttered amid pain and tragedy that most people couldn’t imagine—she’s been remembered. She, though, may have been the model wife in every way, caring for her household, ministering to her suffering husband, taking food to him at the dump, nursing his boils, etc. But those good acts are not recorded; instead, the emphasis is on her husband and his suffering, with her only appearance being her urging him to do the very thing that Satan wanted.

Both husband and wife, as a couple, suffered with their losses; each one, though, reacted differently to them. We’re not called to judge him or her but to learn and to take heed.

The Week at a Glance: The story of Job and his wife reveals early on the reality of tragedy and suffering here on earth.

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

The Story of Job

For thousands of years the story of Job has inspired, baffled, and challenged readers. God alone knows how many books, commentaries, and essays have been written on this ancient book that, along with Genesis, are the two oldest books in the Bible, both written by Moses in Midian. “The long years spent amid desert solitudes were not lost. Not only was Moses gaining a preparation for the great work before him, but during this time, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book of Genesis and also the book of Job, which would be read with the deepest interest by the people of God until the close of time.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*®, Feb. 19, 1880.

Read Job 1:1–2:8. What do these texts tell us about the character and nature of Job? What is it about his nature and character that make all the things that happen to him even harder to understand?

It’s interesting that the book of Job should be, along with Genesis, the first books of the Bible to be written. It’s as if the Lord knew, right from the start, that one of the great questions facing human beings would be the question of evil. If the God of heaven is so loving and so powerful, why is there so much pain and suffering on earth? For many people this question poses the greatest challenge to faith.

Thus, right from the start, the Lord, with the book of Job, along with Genesis, gives us the background of the great controversy theme. We are taken behind the scenes and shown things that—even with all our telescopes and other fancy scientific devices—we would otherwise never see. Though not answering all the questions, the book of Job shows us, if nothing else, that suffering, pain, and calamity have hardly caught God by surprise. Hence, they shouldn’t take us by surprise either, and they certainly don’t present valid reasons for rejecting the God of Scripture.

Write out a paragraph explaining, the best you can, your understanding of why suffering exists in the world despite God’s love for it. Be prepared to bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Remember Job's Wife

Read over again the calamities that befell this couple. Only now put yourself in Job's wife's place. What must have been going on in this poor woman's mind?

Though the story of Job centers on him and his sufferings, we mustn't forget his wife. It was her servants, too, who were destroyed; it was the property that she benefited from that was destroyed; and it was her children, the fruit of her womb, that were suddenly killed. Then to top it off, it was her husband, the person with whom she had become "one flesh" (*Gen. 2:24*), who was suddenly struck down with loathsome sores and boils. Whatever Job himself suffered, she suffered the same, maybe even more. One should easily understand her distress. As the Bible presents the story, however, she's given only one line out of 42 full chapters. Obviously, more went on behind the scenes than what's revealed to us here.

Read Job 2:9. Focus particularly on her question. What's implied in it?

In Job 1:1, Job is described as someone who was *tam vyahsar*, translated "blameless and upright" (*NIV*). It's interesting that in her question "Do you still hold fast to your integrity?" (*Job 2:9, NKJV*), the word for "integrity" is from the same word for "blameless" in Job 1:1, which in Hebrew also means "complete," or "perfect" (*see also Gen. 6:9, 17:1, Pss. 37:37, 64:4*). It's also the same word that God uses to describe Job once in Job 1:8 and twice in Job 2:3 ("perfect," "integrity"). Thus, exactly how Job is described four times is the specific point about his character that she is now questioning. *How can you still stay so "blameless" before God with all these things happening to us?* Again, we mustn't forget that this couple shared these calamities; what happened to Job wasn't much different from what happened to her.

The idea here is that these things shouldn't happen to us if we are "blameless" before God. What's wrong with that kind of thinking? At the same time, in what ways does being "blameless" bring benefits even now to our lives?

Satan's Tempresses

Review Genesis 3:1–13. What parallels can you find between this story and the story of Job and his wife?

There are several similarities in the story of Adam and the story of Job. First, both men were “perfect” and “complete,” at least in their respective spheres. Second, both were facing tests that dealt with, literally, cosmic issues. Third, both their wives were victimized by Satan, though in different ways. Fourth, in both cases Satan used the wives as instruments of temptation against their husbands.

Read again Satan's charges against Job (*Job 1:7–11, 2:3–5*). In what way is Job's wife, however unwittingly, being used by Satan against her own husband?

Job's wife surely didn't know any more about the cosmic drama unfolding behind the scenes than did her husband. Satan was duping her, using her for his ends. Satan took advantage of Eve amid the bliss and happiness of Eden; in contrast, he took advantage of Job's wife amid unspeakable pain and suffering. Our cruel foe will use whatever he can, and whomever he can, in any circumstances he can, in order to lead us into sin and away from God. We should also note that Adam, sinless and in the bliss and perfection of Eden, succumbed to the deceptions; Job, a fallen being living amid terrible pain and suffering, didn't. What a testimony to the integrity of Job.

Ask yourself, male or female, What can I do to make sure that I never place myself in a position where I am tempting someone either wittingly or unwittingly, especially someone close to me, to do the wrong thing?

Curse God and Die!

Satan's whole point against God was that Job was "blameless" only because God was so good to him and that the moment things went bad, Job would turn against Him. Twice Satan said that Job would "curse" God to His face. As we saw, the exact thing that Satan said Job would do was the exact thing that his wife told him to do. Again, how careful we need to be with the words we speak, especially in moments of intense emotions.

What do the following texts say about the power and importance of words? *Prov. 13:3; 25:11; Eccles. 10:12; Matt. 12:36, 37; John 5:24.*

Commentators on the book of Job have noticed one very interesting point. When Satan says twice that Job will "curse" God to His face and when Job's wife tells him to "curse" God, the typical Hebrew words for "curse" aren't used. Instead, the word comes from the root *brk*, which commonly means "bless" (*Gen. 12:2, Exod. 12:32, Ruth 2:4, Ps. 26:12*). The psalmist writes about *blessing* (from *brk*) the Lord (*Ps. 16:7, 26:12, 34:1*). Now, though, in Job, the same word is translated *curse*. (In Job 1:5 the word *curse* is also from *brk*; also in 1 Kings 21:10, the same use of *brk* appears.)

Read those verses we've looked at in Job where the root *brk* is translated "curse," but the word *bless* is put in instead. What happens?

Clearly the texts don't make sense if *brk* here were to mean *bless*. Maybe in the case of Job's wife, one could argue that she was being sarcastic (as was Satan before God): *Sure, Job, why not bless God for all His goodness to us and then die!* However, seeing how it's used, for instance, in Job 1:5, it's clear that this is just one of the idioms of language in which words are used in unexpected ways.

How careful are you with your words? What can you do to make sure that you don't say things that you will regret later, things that can bring suffering upon yourself and others?

Supporting Each Other

Job's wife must have been his support in most ways during his ordeal. She must have suffered as she prepared his meals and bathed his sores. His gaunt body and peeling skin must have tore at her heart. She alone ventured close enough to get hit by his foul breath (*Job 19:17*). When she finally broke down, it was not against him, neither was it for her own sake, but for his. She had kept her cool as asset after asset disappeared. She is not recorded as uttering any unbecoming word when her ten children were felled in one blow. But the sight of her suffering husband was the last straw in the series of undeserving reverses. Hers was a righteous indignation.

Read Job 2:10. What was the essence of Job's reaction? What did it say about his faithfulness to God, even despite great pain?

In response to his wife's outburst, Job does not call *her* foolish. He says she speaks *like* one of the foolish women. She is not a foolish woman, and this is not her normal behavior; it is unbecoming of her. Thus, Job's words seem to indicate something about her; that she was, under normal circumstances, not one of the "foolish" women. This, though, wasn't a normal circumstance at all.

What wrong idea did Job express in regard to the nature of his suffering?

Even though Job wrongly attributes his suffering to God, he seeks to stay faithful to God anyway. His use of the words *good* and *evil* are the same Hebrew words used in Genesis 2:17 to describe the forbidden tree. Humans were never to know evil, only good. Evil doesn't come from God; it comes only from a deviation or falling away from God. Evil, though, has become so pervasive that even the blameless suffer from it. Of course, of all the blameless ones to suffer from sin, none was more blameless than Jesus, and no one suffered from evil more than He did (*Isa. 53:3-6, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Pet. 2:24, 4:1*).

Read the first chapter of 1 Peter. What message does he have there that parallels the story of the Jobs? Then ask yourself, How well do I hold up under suffering? What lessons do I need to learn that will better enable me to remain faithful regardless of the circumstances?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “A Happy, Successful Partnership,” pp. 105–113, in *The Adventist Home*.

“We know very little about this woman, and the tendency has been to consider her an evil woman. Undoubtedly Job’s suffering caused her to suffer as well. Losing all her wealth was painful, but even more emotionally and psychologically devastating would have been losing all her children. Her pain may have been even more intense than her husband’s. Yet in the story she bears her pain quietly. She loved Job. It must have been extremely painful for her to see her husband going through excruciating physical, psychological, and spiritual pain and be unable to do anything to bring relief. There seems to be only one way left for her. She speaks to Job from the depth of her love and concern for him. She doesn’t realize that, like Peter, she is echoing Satan’s words. No, she is not a foolish woman, but that day she spoke ‘like’ one.”—Ángel Rodríguez, *Adventist Review*[®], Apr. 13, 2000, p. 27.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, read aloud your answers to Sunday’s final question. What can you learn from each other? How good are the answers? What questions remain unanswered? How can we help each other live with unanswered questions about pain and suffering?
- ❷ What are practical ways in which spouses can work to encourage, uplift, and help each other spiritually, as opposed to being instruments of temptation and the cause that makes it easier for the other to stumble?
- ❸ Is there someone in your church who has recently suffered a tragedy? What can you do as a class, in a practical way, to encourage that person and to help him or her work through the grief?
- ❹ As a class, talk about the idea of taking the name of the Lord in vain. What are examples of how we might even unwittingly be guilty of that sin? Think about phrases, curses, idioms, and slang words in your own language as you discuss the answer.

Summary: The Jobs bore their reverses with equanimity. Even though she may have suffered more than Job, the wife broke down only when she could no longer bear to see the pain her husband was in. We can look to them for inspiration when we are faced with similar losses that pale in comparison with theirs.

Witchcraft to Wonderful Savior

by ANTONIO SINABARE

I grew up in Mozambique, in a family that worshiped traditional gods and practiced witchcraft. I became sick and lost consciousness for hours at a time. My parents, with all their witchcraft, could not help me.

My sisters attended a Christian church. I noticed that when they sang Christian songs, I felt better. I began attending their church looking for healing. The pastor took me into his home to help me. When he saw the devil strings I wore, he told me to remove them. I obeyed, and from that day on I had no more fainting spells.

The pastor said I had the spirit of prophecy and healing, a gift from God that I could use to bless others. I prophesied and laid hands on people, who were healed. I was filled with pride that I was doing God's work. But I soon learned differently.

Controversy split my church, and my pastor and I formed another church. The pastor invited a teacher to teach us the Bible, hoping to increase our group's size and strength. The teacher taught things that I had never heard before. He showed us that when people die, they sleep until Jesus comes rather than go to heaven. When he showed us God's true Sabbath, our little group became divided. Eight church members, including my wife and me, began attending the Adventist church on Sabbath and our church on Sunday.

After my wife and I joined the Adventist church, I learned how to hold evangelistic meetings and give Bible studies. I began visiting neighbors and members of other churches, offering to study the Bible with them. I held a small evangelistic series, and six people followed Jesus and joined the Adventist church. Some leaders of other churches threatened us, but I could not stop sharing what I knew was God's truth with others.

We moved to an area that had no Adventist congregation, and we planted a church there. The more I taught others, the stronger my own faith grew. It was like a fire in my bones; I had to share my faith with others. In six years God has helped me plant two churches. The members are faithful, and the congregations continue to grow. One congregation now has 40 members.

I no longer feel pride in the powers I thought God had given me. I find joy in humbly teaching God's truth to others and training new believers to bring their friends to Jesus and teach them.

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David *and* Bathsheba: Adultery *and* After



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Samuel 11, 12.

Memory Text: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

The marriage of David and Bathsheba is a model for how to do almost everything wrong. Born out of adultery, then complicated with deception and murder, it's a sordid account of just how fallen humanity has become.

In the incident with Bathsheba, David broke the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”; the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”; the ninth commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”; and the tenth commandment, “Thou shalt not covet” (*Exod. 20:1–17*). Whatever pressures David put on her, Bathsheba put herself in a very vulnerable position when she washed herself in sight of the king's house. Whoever imagined that a little bath water could be so dangerous? Whether a deliberate ploy to entice the king or just an unfortunate lapse in judgment, her indiscretion ended in dire consequences for them both.

In the end, the fact that David received forgiveness stands as a powerful testimony of God's grace for even the most inexcusable sins, sins that weren't just sins but crimes. While we marvel at how low David stooped, what's even more marvelous is that God's grace extended even to the depths of human depravity. How fortunate for us.

The Week at a Glance: The story of David and Bathsheba ever bears witness to how even the most godly people, unless careful, can fall into the worst of sin. How fortunate that we have a God who forgives the unforgivable.

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

Precursor to a Fall

Read 2 Samuel 3:1–5 and 2 Samuel 5:13. What’s in these texts that helps us understand why David would do what he did with Bathsheba and, on the other hand, helps us understand why his act of adultery was even more heinous?

Proverbs says that “the eyes of man are never satisfied” (*Prov. 27:20*). How true in the case of David. By the time he lusted after Bathsheba, he already had more than six wives and who knows how many concubines. *And yet that was not enough?* And worse, to satisfy his lusts he had to take another man’s wife?

We shouldn’t miss the important principle here: Any deviation from the will of God opens the soul up to more and more folly and deception. By transgressing God’s will, David opened himself to more temptation. The indulgence of a passion, far from removing the passion, only makes that passion stronger and stronger. Had David followed God’s ideal, one man, one wife, he would have been less open to Satan’s temptations. In this case the floodgates were opened, and David was swept away in the deluge.

Read James 1:12–15. What warning to us is the Lord giving here?

Those who have ever struggled with addiction, with uncontrollable desires of any kind, know how sin is never satisfied. The more you indulge it, the more you want it; and the more you want it, the easier it is to make excuses for it until you are enslaved by it. As Jesus said, “‘Everyone who sins is a slave to sin’” (*John 8:34, NIV*).

What has been your own experience with powerful temptations, with addictions, with drives that seem to control you rather than vice versa? What promises do we have for victory? What choices do you have to make in order to make those promises real in your own life?

The Fall

Read 2 Samuel 11:1–5. What were the steps that led to David’s fall? At what points in the progression of events could he have stopped before sinning? What Old Testament stories would he have known about that he could have drawn inspiration from? *See, for instance, Gen. 39:7–14.*

The initial temptation from “seeing” comes to all of us. This may be involuntary and is not sin. The next step is stopping to investigate. This could be treading on very dangerous ground and may be sin in the mind. It could be very difficult to keep from getting into the next and final step, the actual misdeed.

It’s clear, though, that right from the start David knew exactly what he was doing. He had inquired about who she was, and even though he was told, directly, that she was the wife of another man, he, nevertheless, had her brought to him in order to fulfill his own lusts. What other reason did he have to do this? She was already married, so he wasn’t interested in making her a wife. He wasn’t interested in falling in love with her. He was, it seems, driven purely by passion.

Plus, was he not the king? Was he not used to getting whatever he wanted? Why not, then, this woman, as well?

Read again 2 Samuel 11:4. What can we tell about Bathsheba and how she responded to David’s seduction?

Was she flattered by the attention of the king, or did she try to resist his advances? Might she have been purposely washing herself in his sight, or was she taking for granted that the king would be off fighting with his army, as was the custom in the spring, according to the Bible (*2 Sam. 11:1*)? The text makes no indication that the king had forced her, such as in Ammon’s rape of Tamar (*2 Sam. 13:14*). Nor does it say that she willingly gave herself to him. Whatever the details, David—who should have known better—took advantage of this young woman and led them both into sin.

Sexual drives can be very strong. How careful are we not to take advantage of these weaknesses in others and exploit them for personal satisfaction or gain? What kind of messages are you sending by your words, your dress, your body language?

The Cover-up

In 2 Samuel 11:5, Bathsheba tells David that she's pregnant. That she just assumed David was the father indicates that she probably hadn't been with anyone else, including her own husband.

Read 2 Samuel 11:6–25. Does Bathsheba play a role in the cover-up of her husband? Explain.

We have no indication whatsoever that Bathsheba knew of David's plans for her husband. He probably wanted it that way. The fact, however, that David tried to get Uriah to go home to his wife probably indicated that David was sure that she wasn't going to tell her husband that she got pregnant by the king.

Why not? See Lev. 20:10.

David had her in a bind. Had she confessed, she would have faced the possibility of death. And had it come down to it, David would have denied everything (after all, he committed murder in order to try to get out of it). How much easier if all he had to do was tell a lie! *Why would I, with all these wives and concubines, take the wife of one of my most trusted and valiant soldiers?* And Bathsheba, pregnant with another man's baby, would have had no way to prove his guilt either. Who would believe her word against a beloved and powerful king with all these women at his disposal? She was totally helpless.

Thus, from her perspective, what would she gain from confessing? David apparently knew this, which was why he felt safe in trying to get Uriah into her presence. As it turned out, of course, that never happened.

Look at how quickly one moment of uncontrolled passion led to a spiral of sin and crime in a man of God. How carefully are you controlling your passions, your desires? How can you better place yourself in a position where you are less tempted by things that can lead you down this same horrid path?

The Wages of Sin

Read 2 Samuel 11:26, 27. What does this tell us about both David and Bathsheba?

Bathsheba mourned for her dead husband. What might have made her grief even worse was the knowledge that, perhaps, she was implicated in his death. How much she knew, at that time, regarding David's deeds we don't know, but eventually the rumors started spreading about David's sins. Meanwhile, David did the only "honorable" thing he could and took her to him as a wife. Let's assume that she needed at least a month to know that she was pregnant; let's assume, too, that she mourned for her husband 30 days (*Num. 20:29*). Depending, then, on how long it took David to get Uriah killed, it's still hard to see how anyone could not have known something was amiss regarding the timing of this child's birth.

Read 2 Samuel 12:13–23. What principle do we see operating here?

It's hard to understand why an innocent baby should suffer for sins he had nothing to do with. But this is the horrible nature of sin. It leads to the suffering of others, even those who might have had nothing to do with the sin. How many spouses and children have suffered terribly because of the sin of adultery committed by a parent? Sin never happens in isolation. Sooner or later, in one way or another, the consequences appear. *What other examples can you find in the Bible of this same principle?*

Read 2 Samuel 12:24. What does this tell us about the relationship between David and Bathsheba?

Theirs was, from the start, a marriage that never should have been. David, though, shows here compassion for her, and they eventually have another child together.

Forgiven sin can bring about horrible consequences anyway. What lesson can you take from this story as you daily confront temptations to sin?

David and Bathsheba: The Final Days

After the birth of Solomon, Bathsheba disappears from the pages of the Bible until years later, at the end of David's reign. She would have become simply another one of David's wives had it not been for the fact that their next son, Solomon, was destined to take the throne of Israel. In 1 Chronicles 22:5–9, David stated that the Lord told him that Solomon was to be the next king.

Read 1 Kings 1:1–27. What is happening here? Why would Adonijah believe that he should have the throne before Solomon? See 2 Samuel 3:4.

For whatever reason, God chose Solomon to be the heir to the throne. Bathsheba, after the birth of Solomon, doesn't appear again until Adonijah's revolt, where she and Nathan inform David of what is happening. Both she and Nathan know that Solomon, not Adonijah, was the Lord's choice.

David comforts Bathsheba after their son dies. And now as the kingdom is poised on the brink of civil war, more than ever, Bathsheba needs the king's assurance to secure the succession of their son.

Read 1 Kings 1:28–31. Notice her response to the king after he gives her the reassurance she longs for. What might that say about their relationship, as well? How does Bathsheba's approach and respect for the king, her husband, model how we, as a church, should approach our King, Jesus, with our petitions?

Any kind of a good relationship—marriage, friendship, or one between a parent and child—needs nurturing. What immediate relationships of yours need some mending, some nurture, some work? What steps can you take to make that relationship better?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Moral Standards,” pp. 326–339, in *The Adventist Home*.

“Many have murmured at what they called God’s injustice in sparing David, whose guilt was so great, after having rejected Saul for what appear to them to be far less flagrant sins. But David humbled himself and confessed his sin, while Saul despised reproof and hardened his heart in impenitence. . . .

“Whoever under the reproof of God will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. Whoever will in faith accept God’s promises, will find pardon. The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul. He has given this promise: ‘Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.’ Isaiah 27:5. ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.’ Isaiah 55:7.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 726.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the story of Nathan with David (*2 Sam. 12:1–8*). Notice how obvious it should have been to David, right from the start, that this story was about him. And yet, he totally missed it. What lessons can we take from this about how easy it is to deceive ourselves regarding sin? As a class, talk about what precautions we can take to protect ourselves, and each other, from falling into such gross self-deception.
- 2 As a class, read Psalm 51 together. Discuss the elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ that are found there. What does it teach us about the power of God’s grace in our lives?
- 3 What practical spiritual truths can we learn from the story of David and Bathsheba that can help us avoid the kind of mistakes made here? What can we do to help each other avoid the kind of pit that David fell into?

Summary: Take heed—even the mightiest among us can fall; and the mightier they are, the worse the consequences. The story of David and Bathsheba contains a powerful message about the cost of sin, as well as the greatness of God’s grace.

The Pain That Saved

by DASS KUMAR

Ganesan grew up in a family that was devoted to the idols they worshiped in their hometown in India. They spent much time and money decorating the idols and praying to them. Ganesan continued the family devotion into adulthood.

One day as he was working, he was struck by an intense pain in his cheek so severe that he fell down. The pain subsided, but it often returned, disrupting his work, his sleep, his entire life. Doctors could not relieve the pain, so for months Ganesan went to the temple to offer gifts and pray for relief. But the pain returned day after day. At times it grew so severe that Ganesan thought only death would bring relief.

One day a cousin learned of Ganesan's trouble and invited him to visit her church to let the members pray for him. Ganesan went, and the members prayed, but the pain continued. He wanted to understand more about Jesus, whom Christians worshiped, but he found the pastor's words difficult to understand.

Then one day as he sat reading his Bible, some visitors knocked at his door. They saw his New Testament and asked him about his faith. Ganesan said he was searching for God and for healing from the pain that was destroying his life. The visitors offered to return and study the Bible with him, and Ganesan agreed.

As Ganesan and his sister Mohana studied their Bible, they realized they had wasted so much time and money worshiping idols that could not hear or speak or answer prayers. They removed the idols from their home and committed themselves to worship the only true God.

Mohana and Ganesan attended evangelistic meetings and were among the first to commit their lives to Christ in baptism. As Ganesan was immersed in baptism, he felt something touch him. Soon he realized that the pain in his cheek that had plagued him for months was gone.



Ganesan changed his name to Jacob, one who wrestled with God. He and his sister now share their faith and their testimonies with their neighbors and invite them to come and see that Jesus is the living, all-powerful God.

JACOB GANESAN (left). DASS KUMAR is a pastor in Chennai (Madras), India.

Ahab and Jezebel: Abuse of Authority



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 16:28–18:46.*

Memory Text: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (*2 Corinthians 6:14*).

If there were ever a couple in the Bible not to emulate, it would be Ahab and Jezebel. Talk about a marriage made in hell! When you take one weak-willed king and add to him a power-hungry and conniving woman, the result will not be good.

In many ways this week's study is about power and authority; more specifically, it's about the abuse of power and authority.

Power and authority are gifts from God. Those who have them have the divine responsibility to wield that power and authority in a godly way. When they don't, they are sinning, not just against people, but against God Himself. As we'll see this week, Ahab and Jezebel used their power and their authority in a way contrary to the will of God. They reaped the consequences, too. There's a good lesson here for all of us regarding how we use whatever power we have been granted.

The Week at a Glance: Ahab and Jezebel were a husband-and-wife team that brought out the worst in each other. That's bad enough for any marriage, but when they happened to be the leaders of a nation, the results were disastrous.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 15.*

Ahab

Last week we looked at David’s sin against Bathsheba, the sin that led to so much pain and suffering, not just for himself, but for his nation. Indeed, his weakened stature helped fuel the seeds of rebellion in his own house, and that certainly helped pave the way for the rending of the nation into two separate kingdoms a generation or so later.

Read 1 Kings 16:28–30. What does this tell us about the character of Ahab?

What were some of the things that previous kings had done? 1 Kings 12:25–33; 13:33, 34; 14:22–27; 15:26, 34; 16:15–20, 25. How does this help us understand the degree of wickedness found in Ahab’s reign?

“Two years before the death of Asa, Ahab began to rule in the kingdom of Israel. From the beginning his reign was marked by a strange and terrible apostasy. His father, Omri, the founder of Samaria, had ‘wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him’ (1 Kings 16:25); but the sins of Ahab were even greater. He ‘did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him,’ acting ‘as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.’ Verses 33, 31. Not content with encouraging the forms of religious service followed at Bethel and Dan, he boldly led the people into the grossest heathenism, by setting aside the worship of Jehovah for Baal worship.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 114.

From our perspective it’s hard to understand how these kings could have fallen into such sin and apostasy. But that’s the problem: We’re looking at these things from our perspective, not theirs. Who knows what any of us might have done were we in the same position. These stories should serve as a warning to all of us about how easily we can fall away from the living God.

What daily steps can you take in your own life to protect yourself against slowly, steadily moving away from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ?

Power Couple

As if everything Ahab had already done weren't bad enough, he added to his sin by marrying Jezebel (*1 Kings 16:31*), the pagan princess whose name has become synonymous with evil.

This more than likely was a marriage born out of political expediency than out of love. War, mostly with Aram under Ben-hadad, dominated the 22-year reign of Ahab. This conflict prompted alliances with other threatened neighbors and resulted in Ahab's marrying Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, who also served as a priest of Astarte. Sometime later Ahab's daughter Athaliah helped cement ties with Judah through marriage with Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat and crown prince of Judah.

Right after the Bible says that he married Jezebel, what did Ahab start doing? *1 Kings 16:31–33*.

Already so filled with sin and compromise, Ahab probably didn't need a lot of encouragement from his pagan wife not only to serve Baal but also to help spread the worship of Baal in the nation of Israel. Was she doing it because she was a true believer in her god, or was she doing it to consolidate power? After all, if the followers of Yahweh had control, she would probably be dead, not queen. More than likely she was interested in keeping power. How convenient to use a supposed devotion to her "god" as a way of getting that power.

What evidence do we have of her attempts to eradicate the worship of the true God and replace it with Baal worship? *1 Kings 18:4, 13; 19:1, 2; 21:25*.

One sin led to another and another. . . . Before long the king had reached levels of degradation he himself probably couldn't have ever imagined. What lessons can we learn from this sad account that can help us not make the same kind of errors?

Jezebel and Elijah

Review the famous story in 1 Kings 18. What issues were at stake here?

A powerful struggle between Elijah and Jezebel ensued. As queen, Jezebel held political clout. With religious fervor she carried on in Israel the work of her father, king and priest of Baal and Astarte in Tyre and Sidon. Ahab built a temple to Baal for Jezebel, which doubtless included a “seminary” for the training of priests. Jezebel personally presided over the Baal cult in Israel and made it the state religion.

How did Jezebel show her support for the prophets of her cult? See 1 Kings 18:19.

Four hundred of these prophets ate at her table. This means that they had access to the royal household, all with the support of her husband. She obviously had a powerful sway over him.

In the face of this rampant apostasy, Elijah led the struggle to keep Yahweh worship alive. Appropriately, his name meant “my God is Yahweh.” The religious conflict came to a head when Elijah burst into the presence of King Ahab and announced that there would be no dew or rain except at God’s word (*1 Kings 17:1*). This was a direct attack on Baal, god of rain and, therefore, god of fertility. Ahab labeled Elijah the “troubler of Israel” (*1 Kings 18:17, NIV*), but Elijah turned the label back at him. It is not Elijah who is the cause for the drought, but Ahab’s departure from the worship of Yahweh (*vss. 16–18*). Later, on the summit of Mount Carmel (in the absence of Jezebel but in the presence of Ahab), Elijah exposed the impotence of Baal and demonstrated the power of Yahweh over rain. Ahab was as impotent as Baal. Helplessly he watched the defeat of Baalism and the slaughter of the hundreds of priests. Back home he had to explain to Jezebel why she did not have to have food ready the next day for all the priests of Baal.

What kind of negative influences are you surrounded with? What can you do, as much as possible, to negate those influences?

Naboth's Vineyard

How did Ahab allow things to get so bad under his rule? The story of Naboth's vineyard gives us insights. Read 1 Kings 21:1–4. What do we see here about the character of Ahab that explains so much?

In 1 Kings 21:5–7 we see how Jezebel responded. What a contrast! No wonder she was able to dominate the kingdom. While her husband went home sulking, ready to give up, she conspired to get him what he wanted. Her reaction is “Are you king of Israel or what?” Again we see evidence that for Jezebel the issue was one of power and domination and that she was married to someone who would not stop her quest to get it.

Read the rest of the story (1 Kings 21:8–16). How did Jezebel go about achieving her aims? What very clever ploy did she use? What does this tell us about her?

Jezebel seemed to be quite aware of Israelite law; hence, she was able to use it to her advantage. Besides the calling of a fast, which meant that some horrible sin that needed to be dealt with had been committed, she had Naboth accused of a crime that, she knew, would lead to death (*Lev. 24:16*). Then, finally, she had it arranged that at least two witnesses would be summoned (*Num. 35:30, Deut. 17:6*), which was required according to their law. This woman knew exactly what she was doing; though someone who obviously didn't follow the religion of Yahweh, she knew how to exploit it to her advantage.

The rest of the chapter (1 Kings 21:17–29) shows that though Jezebel was the instigator of this crime, the Lord held Ahab responsible, as well. Ahab knew what was going on and did nothing to stop it. He was as guilty as his wife of this crime.

Think about how easy it is to use religion to exploit people. How might you have been tempted to use faith to push people to do what you want? Why must we be very careful not to allow ourselves to fall into that trap?

The End Comes . . .

Ahab's and Jezebel's deliberate actions in causing Israel to change their allegiance to Baal worship and to participate in all the immorality associated with it could not fail to arouse God's wrath. On top of that, they added the sin of flaunting all norms of decent government and perpetrated the cold-blooded murder of the innocent Naboth. Their marriage was the worst possible combination: a weak-willed king married to an unscrupulous and manipulative power-hungry woman. No wonder it was a disaster for Israel.

How ultimately did both Ahab and Jezebel meet their end? *1 Kings 22:29–40, 2 Kings 9:30–37.*

The baneful influence of this wretched alliance didn't end only with them. They were able to pass on their influence to the next generation.

Read *1 Kings 22:51–53.* What does that tell us about the continued influence of these two wicked people?

“During his father's reign, Ahaziah had witnessed the wondrous works of the Most High. He had seen the terrible evidences that God had given apostate Israel of the way in which He regards those who set aside the binding claims of His law. Ahaziah had acted as if these awful realities were but idle tales. Instead of humbling his heart before the Lord, he had followed after Baal, and at last he had ventured upon this, his most daring act of impiety. Rebellious, and unwilling to repent, Ahaziah died, ‘according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.’”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 209, 210.

In what immediate ways have you been impacted by the sins of others? What biblical principles, and promises, can you claim to help alleviate the damage done?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Exercise Authority With Humility,” p. 215, in *The Adventist Home*.

“Ahab was weak in moral power. His union by marriage with an idolatrous woman of decided character and positive temperament resulted disastrously both to himself and to the nation. Unprincipled, and with no high standard of rightdoing, his character was easily molded by the determined spirit of Jezebel. His selfish nature was incapable of appreciating the mercies of God to Israel and his own obligations as the guardian and leader of the chosen people.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 115.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In many ways this week’s lesson was a lesson about the use of power. What are the privileges that come with power? What are the dangers? As a class, talk about the kind of power that comes specifically with religion. What particular dangers must be avoided in the wielding of the power associated with religion? Why can this kind of power be the most dangerous, if abused? How can we as a church help protect ourselves and others from this kind of abuse?
- 2 Another lesson we can gather from this week’s study deals with influence. In class, talk about the kind of influences we have as individuals and as a church. What can we do to make sure that our influence is as positive as possible, both in the world and in the church?
- 3 Think about the first impression of your local church. Put yourself in the position of a first-time visitor. What kind of impression do you think your church makes? What are the strong points? What are the weak points? What can you do as a class to help make that first impression as good as it can be?

Summary: Bad to begin with, Ahab became much worse under the influence of Jezebel. No other couple abused their authority as much as they did. God had to intervene to save both Israel and Judah from ruin.

Caught Off Guard

by DAVID PRICE

Iris Chan loved to surf the Internet. She often slipped into Internet chat rooms just to see what was happening. The last thing she expected to find on the Internet was God.

Iris grew up in a Chinese family that did not believe in God or any religion. “For more than twenty-five years, I had shut God out of my life,” she said.

Then in 2001 Iris hit an emotional brick wall during a traumatic breakup. While surfing one day on the Internet, she entered a chat room and there met a guy who lived not far from her in Sydney, Australia. This guy surprised her by announcing that he was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and a vegetarian. Iris was surprised but not turned off. She responded to him, and thus began an online friendship that eventually led to Iris visiting a Seventh-day Adventist church.

Iris went, and the experience plunged her into a period of intense questioning about God and the Bible. The pastor patiently addressed her questions and helped her find the answers she needed. Iris admits that she was still skeptical of Christianity when she accepted an invitation to attend a Daniel and Revelation seminar. But there she saw the Bible as authentic and reliable. After months of additional questions and answers, Iris surrendered her life to Christ and was baptized.

Iris now uses her computer skills for God. She is her own church’s webmaster and has developed online Bible prophecy study courses as part of the Greater Sydney Conference’s initiative in Internet outreach. She currently interacts with more than one hundred students online.

Iris’s story shows how God can use any medium to reach even non-searchers and draw them to the feet of Jesus. “There is no medium that God cannot use to reach people who are searching for something, even something they cannot name,” Iris says.

The Adventist Discovery Center in Sydney, Australia, is constantly seeking new ways to reach people with the gospel. Iris knows it will work, for God used the Internet, the one thing she was passionate about, to reach her soul.

DAVID PRICE *is associate director of the Adventist Discovery Center in Sydney, Australia.*

Hosea *and* Gomer: Forgiving *the* Unfaithful



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Hosea 1–3.*

Memory Text: “The Lord said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes’” (*Hosea 3:1, NIV*).

There are many who believe that the story of Hosea and Gomer should not be taken literally. God, they believe, would not require anyone, least of all a prophet, to undergo such a tragic experience. Such people believe that the story should be understood as an allegory.

But why? God used other prophets' family lives to illustrate their messages, so why not this one? Isaiah pointed out that he and his children were signs and symbols in Israel from God (*Isa. 8:18*). Jeremiah was instructed not to marry or to have children, all in order to reinforce his message of doom (*Jer. 16:2–4*). Ezekiel's wife died and God, who foretold it, instructed the prophet not to mourn for her (*Ezek. 24:16*).

Thus, we may take the story literally, as the experience of a prophet who had a wife, lost her to other men, but lovingly took her back. This is not an isolated incident. Throughout history men and women have forgiven an unfaithful spouse and rebuilt a wholesome relationship.

The Week at a Glance: The story of Hosea and Gomer powerfully illustrates God's love for His wayward people.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 22.*

Hosea and Gomer

When you consider the kind of intimate relationship that the Lord sought with His people, a relationship compared with marriage (*Hos. 2:19, 20; Isa. 62:5*), then the imagery and symbolism that takes place here becomes clearer.

From what we can tell, Hosea's prophetic ministry spanned the reigns of Uzziah (790–739), Jotham (750–732), Ahaz (735–715), and Hezekiah (729–686), kings of Judah. This acknowledges a ministry of about forty years and corresponds with the idea that both his ministry and his marriage commenced about the same time. Nothing more is known about the prophet as a person. His father, Beeri, is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. His hometown is not identified. His messages address the northern kingdom of Israel, and he surely resided there, the only literary prophet to do so. These were the closing years of Israel's history, but Hosea does not record the fall to Assyria in 722 B.C. He must have moved to Judah and written his book before that event. His ministry is dated by kings of Judah.

Based on numerous allusions to baking in Hosea 7:4–8, some suspect that Hosea was a baker by profession. He describes the oven, its fire, and the kneading and rising of the dough.

Read Hosea 1:1, 2. What did God tell Hosea to do? What was the symbolism behind this action? See also *Jer. 3:1, 2, 9; 13:27; Ezek. 16:15, 16; 23:17–19.*

Was Gomer a prostitute? While the NIV calls Gomer adulterous, the Hebrew text does not call her a harlot but uses the phrase “woman/wife of harlotry.” There are several options: (1) She could be the daughter or granddaughter of a harlot (some descendants drifted into the profession themselves). (2) She could be a woman who shows such tendencies. (3) She may be called a harlot by one with a prophetic knowledge of the future. (4) The book was written years later, by which time her character was fully known.

Gomer was obviously a real person. The value of Hosea's relationship with a real unfaithful wife has so much more meaning than if the story were a mere allegory. The Lord used this account to give His people a powerful message about what their spiritual unfaithfulness was really like. No doubt He was seeking to draw them back to Himself.

Gomer's Unfaithfulness

Soon after Hosea married Gomer, we are told that she “bore him” a son (*Hos. 1:3, NIV*). The text indicates that Hosea can claim to be the father of the child. Gomer had two more children, but the text does not say that she bore them to Hosea, just that she “gave birth to a daughter,” and “had another son” (*vs. 6, 8, NIV*). The language allows for Hosea not to have been the father. Some Bibles openly interpret the texts to say just that.

The first son was named *Jezreel*, which means “God scatters.” The next child was a girl named *Lo-ruhammah*, which means “not loved.” Though God gives the names, it would be appropriate for Hosea to indicate that he does not love a child that is not his. The final child is a son named *Lo-ammi*, meaning “not my people.” Again, this could be a sign that Hosea does not accept the child as his. In fact, Hosea does declare that he cannot show his love to her children because they are the result of adultery, conceived in disgrace (*Hos. 2:4, 5*).

What are Hosea's charges regarding Gomer? *Hos. 2:5, 8.*

It may seem preposterous to think that any person might not know who brings home the food, but there are several ways to understand and apply these passages. We may take a cue from the application to the Israelites. They credited Baal—the god of rain and fertility—with their harvests of the fields and vineyards (grain and wine), their wool, and their oilseeds. They considered their gold and silver also as gifts from Baal and used these metals lavishly in the manufacture of images to him (*see Hos. 8:4, 13:2*). Imagine God's reaction to their obeisance to Baal all the while He was providing rain for their crops in addition to all their other blessings.

There is a certain blindness that comes in with sin. This blindness causes reasoning to be clouded so that persons can come to such stupid conclusions, conclusions they use to justify stupid actions.

What has been your own experience with the power of sin to blind your mind? What other Bible accounts reveal this spiritual danger? See, for instance, John 9. What steps can you take to protect yourself from falling into this blindness?

Spiritual Adultery

As we've seen, if the Bible uses the idea of marriage to depict the intimate relationship that God seeks with His people—then adultery, even whoredom, are appropriate symbols of what happens when God's people are not spiritually faithful to Him.

Of all the ways that married people can hurt each other, adultery has to be one of the worst. A married couple, through physical intimacy, creates a sacred environment that only they themselves, as one flesh, should ever enter. To violate that is to violate a sacred trust; it's to share with another what should belong only to that couple.

Read Matthew 5:32. What can we discern here from Christ's words about just how bad adultery is?

The real issue, however, in the story of Hosea isn't marital infidelity; it's spiritual apostasy; it's about God's people going after other gods. Today most of us are not polytheists; we don't openly seek and worship what we believe are other divine entities (Satan knows we're too sophisticated for that). However, spiritual adultery isn't dead among us. There are numerous ways in which we can be lured into this kind of adultery, even whoredom.

What are some things that we face today that could lead us, as individuals, or even as a church, into spiritual adultery?

We mustn't be fooled: Bit by bit, little by little, we can slowly be lured away from total dedication and faithfulness to God. Slowly but surely the ways of the world, its methods, its ideology, and its moral views can cause us to depart from the intimate and close relationship that God wants with us, and before we know it, we're committing spiritual adultery.

None of us are immune to the temptations of spiritual adultery. What are some Bible texts that, if obeyed, could help protect us? Find the texts, write them down, and bring them to class on Sabbath. See, for instance, Phil. 4:8, Col. 2:6, 1 Pet. 4:1.

Bearing the Fruit of Unfaithfulness

Sin is always what it has been: the most deadly and destructive force in the universe. However pleasurable it can be, in one way or another, it always reaps bitter results. How many men and women, for instance, thinking they would find happiness through their adulterous affairs, ended up bringing only sadness and pain to themselves and others?

What happens to Gomer as she plays the harlot? *Read Hos. 2:1–13.*

What parable of Jesus does this story remind you of? *See especially Hos. 2:7.*

All through the history of ancient Israel, the people were tempted to worship idols, images of “silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know” (*Dan. 5:23*). Again, we might not be tempted today to bow down and worship idols, but we can be just as easily swept away from God by things of the world that in the end do not satisfy us, that cannot meet the deepest needs of our hearts, and that cannot save us in the day of judgment (*see Jer. 2:27, 28*).

A few years ago in the United States a man won the lottery, taking home more than \$113 million. Within a few years his life was destroyed; the money that had become his god also became the thing that led to his ruin.

The message that the Lord was seeking to teach His people through the story of Hosea and Gomer was this: Be faithful to the only God that there is, the only God who loves you and who can save you and who can provide for your deepest needs.

What has been your own experience with God working to keep you close to Him? How have you responded? What changes do you need to make that will help you better respond to His prompting?

Amazing Love

Read Hosea 2:14–23. Despite everything, what does the Lord tell Hosea to do? What’s the message there for us?

Hosea had already condemned his wife, listed his accusations, and twice passed his verdict. (1) “ ‘Therefore I will block her path . . .’ ” (*Hos. 2:6, NIV*). (2) “ ‘Therefore I will take away my grain . . .’ ” (*vs. 9, NIV*). We are prepared for the third and final verdict; it turns out, however, to be a surprise.

Hosea’s first method of keeping his wife at home could not be a lasting solution. She was bound to escape sooner or later, and even if she didn’t, there could be no real satisfaction in keeping her that way. The second method had a greater chance for success. He had wooed her and won her once before, and he could do it again, provided he was sincere. Hosea was instructed not just to take her back but to love her as the Lord loves the Israelites.

Read Hosea 3. What happens here, and what does it symbolize?

Note that Hosea is not only to take her back but to love her. Not just love her but love her as God loves His people. Hosea followed God’s command again and bought her for 15 shekels of silver and a measure of barley. A slave normally commanded a price of 30 shekels (*Exod. 21:32*), but either the barley made up for the difference, or else Gomer went at a discount.

Hosea taking back his adulterous wife mirrors the historical situation. God loves His people Israel even though they have been adulterous. This is the message delivered by Hosea in words and in action. The Israelites can accept the faithfulness of God so much more easily when they view the faithfulness of Hosea in taking back an unfaithful wife.

Are you where you should be in terms of your relationship with the Lord? Have you committed spiritual adultery? What hope can you draw from the message that God has given us through these chapters?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Moral Standards,” pp. 326–339, in *The Adventist Home*.

The story related in these pages shows us just how willing God is to forgive His erring children. Violation of marriage through infidelity has to be one of the worst ways a person can betray another. And God uses that imagery to depict how He views His own people’s spiritual adultery. Yet, He’s willing to forgive them and take them back. These chapters, if nothing else, reveal to God’s people the extent of His grace.

“Jesus is our Saviour today. He is pleading for us in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, and he will forgive our sins. It makes all the difference in the world with us spiritually whether we rely upon God without doubt, as upon a sure foundation, or whether we are seeking to find some righteousness in ourselves before we come to him. Look away from self to the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. It is a sin to doubt. The least unbelief, if cherished, involves the soul in guilt, and brings great darkness and discouragement. It is saying that the Lord is false, that he will not do as he has promised; and he is greatly dishonored.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (1892), p. 426.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, go over the Bible verses you used to answer the question at the end of Tuesday’s lesson. What practical principles can you take from these texts that can help us, as individuals and as a church, to protect ourselves from spiritual adultery?
- 2** As a class, talk about what you believe the basic message found in these few chapters in Hosea is. What is the Lord telling us as a church today through this story? What lessons should we not draw from it?
- 3** Are there some church members who have fallen away? As a class, make an effort to contact these people, to show them that you care about them and that you are interested in them. In what ways can you show them the kind of grace and mercy that God has revealed to us through this story?

Summary: The marriage of Hosea and Gomer is the best illustration of forgiveness of an unfaithful spouse in the Bible. It’s also an example of God’s willingness to forgive us.

One Man for God

by JOHN T. NOEL

I live in a village in southern Sudan. Most people here belong to a Protestant church that has been working here for 100 years. Then John Charles came to our village. One Sunday he came to visit, and I invited him to worship with me. I was surprised when he said he had worshiped God the day before. “Where do you worship on Saturday?” I asked. He told me that he worshiped in his hut, reading the Bible, singing, and praying alone.

“What do you believe that makes you worship on Saturday?” I asked him.

He answered, “First, let me tell you about Jesus.”

I told him I knew about Jesus, but he said if I truly knew about Jesus, I would follow His commandments. After a long talk, he invited my brother and me to come to his home and hear more. John Charles read about God’s love from the Bible. He explained that God has outlined principles He wants us to live by. He turned to the Ten Commandments and read each one. When he read the fourth commandment, I realized that this was why John Charles worshiped on Saturday. My brother and I believed.

Our friends warned us that John Charles was a false teacher, but I shared with them what he had taught us, including the Ten Commandments. Eventually ten of us studied with John Charles. We all believed, but our families refused to allow us to leave our Protestant church without a fight. My father even brought his spear to try to convince me to reconsider. I refused. But I had a problem. Like many men here, I had two wives. I asked God what to do, and He told me to choose the wife who will share my faith. So I took both wives to the Bible studies with me. My first wife did not want to follow my faith. So I gave her a dowry, and she returned to her parents’ village. My second wife accepted the beliefs I now love, and we have been baptized.

Some of the new believers have become lay evangelists to other villages. I remained in my village, where I study with people who want to know more about God. So far 28 people here have become Adventists and more than one hundred in the area, thanks to John Charles’ fearless ministry. Even my parents are interested in learning God’s truths from the Bible.

Your mission offerings are making a difference in the lives of many in Sudan and throughout the world.

JOHN T. NOEL *shares his faith in his home village in southern Sudan.*

Yahweh *and* Israel: Fulfillment Beyond Failure



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 3:6–14; 6:6–8; Josh. 24:1–18; Jer. 5:19, 22; Ezek. 16:26–29, 34; Hosea 9:1; John 20:21; Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 John 2:12.*

Memory Text: “‘For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth’ ” (*Isaiah 54:5, NIV*).

Hosea, the last prophet to the northern kingdom, Israel, employed the metaphor of marriage to illustrate the relationship between Yahweh and His people. His tragic personal life intertwined with his prophetic ministry. He took back his unfaithful wife to show that Yahweh was prepared to take His wayward people back.

A hundred years later Jeremiah, the last prophet before the Babylonian captivity, tried to prevent Judah from a similar fate. The people of Judah should have learned a lesson from their sister, Israel, but did not.

Ezekiel, at the same time, ministered to the captives in Babylon. Both prophets borrowed the marriage metaphor for Judah. Jeremiah himself never married. God instructed him not to marry or to enter a house for a feast because the sounds of gladness and of marriage were coming to an end (*Jer. 16:2–4, 8, 9*). Ezekiel's wife was taken away suddenly as a sign that the temple was about to be destroyed (*Ezek. 24:15–21*).

The Week at a Glance: Despite His people's unfaithfulness, the Lord was willing to give them another chance.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 29.*

The Beginning of the Relationship

“ ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord’ ” (Jer. 2:2, 3, NIV).

Yahweh identified Himself to Moses and declared that He was about to fulfill His promises to Israel (*Exod. 3:6–14, 6:6–8*). God promised to make them His own people and to give them a land of their own to dwell in.

The prophets considered the time of the journey through the desert like a honeymoon period, a time they were loyal to Yahweh and did not follow other gods. The Israelites experienced a great deliverance in the Exodus, and that event could be likened to the inauguration of the “marriage” promises.

How did Joshua understand what the Lord, through upholding His end of the covenant, had done and would do for Israel? See *Joshua 24*.

vss. 3, 4

vss. 5–7

vss. 8–12

vs. 13

What were the things the Israelites needed to do in return? See *Josh. 24:14–18*.

If you read the words of the Israelites as expressed in the above texts, you can't help coming away with the fervor and sincerity of their expression. God forbid that we should serve any other gods! After all, look at what He has done for us!

How often have you made a vow to the Lord, in all sincerity and fervor at the time, only to violate it later? What can you do to better ensure that you will remain faithful to the things you've promised to the Lord?

Unfaithfulness of the Bride

The reigns of David and Solomon were characterized by general loyalty to Yahweh. But to prevent his subjects from journeying south to the temple and there getting tempted to defect to Judah, Jeroboam, the first king of Israel in the north, constructed golden calves at Dan and Bethel (*1 Kings 12:28–30*). Since he appointed his own priests, the Levites from all the districts of Israel migrated to Judah (*2 Chron. 11:13–16*). Later kings who led Israel to follow other gods were likened to Jeroboam I (*1 Kings 16:7, 26*).

The prophets condemned Israel and Judah for exchanging God’s glory for worthless idols (*Hos. 4:7, Jer. 2:11*) and for resorting to seeking help from other nations, instead of relying on Yahweh (*Jer. 2:18*). This abandoning of trust by Judah in Yahweh, Jeremiah charges, is like forgetting her marriage to Yahweh—forgetting her wedding jewelry and ornaments (*vs. 32*).

What graphic image do the prophets use to describe Israel’s and Judah’s unfaithfulness?

Jer. 5:7

Ezek. 16:26–29, 34

Hos. 9:1

At one moment the relationship is described as like a man and woman on their honeymoon; the next thing you know, the bride is depicted as selling herself into whoredom. Even worse, Ezekiel declares that although most prostitutes charged a fee, Judah was prepared to make a payment for providing her own services (*Ezek. 16:34*)!

Imagine a woman having a loving, caring husband, one who offers to give her so much, who does all for her that he possibly can (*Isa. 5:4*), and yet she abandons that relationship for a string of men who want her only for carnal pleasure.

It makes no sense, and that’s because sin makes no sense. Unless we are surrendered daily to God, sin will cause us to do things just as reckless and foolish.

What reckless and stupid things have you seen people do because of sin? How can you protect yourself from allowing sin to do the same thing to you?

Reaping the Fruits of Unfaithfulness

Though the Bible uses the image of an unfaithful woman, men have proved even more likely to be unfaithful to their spouse. Either way, as so often the case, someone commits adultery, thinking to find happiness where they are forbidden to seek it, only to discover misery and suffering instead.

A man left his wife for another woman. Within two years his lover had milked him for every cent he had; she had given him an incurable venereal disease; and, finally, she had left him for another man. Penniless, diseased, and heartbroken, he begged his former wife to take him back. She refused. Amid all this, the man had the audacity to ask, “Why, God, why have You allowed this to happen to me?”

How often the punishment befits the crime. Living in the Land of Promise hinged on the children of Israel’s loyalty to Yahweh. When they forsook Him in favor of other gods, Yahweh was under no obligation to keep protecting them from the armies of other nations. They were left to reap the fruits of their unfaithfulness.

Read Jeremiah 5:19. What important principle is seen here? *See also Gal. 6:7.*

Read Jeremiah 5:22. What is the Lord saying to His people? What principle is He explaining to them? What warning is implied here, as well?

God created us; He knows more about us than we do. And He knows what’s best for us; and because He loves us, He wants what’s best for us. That’s why He commands us to obey Him (*Deut. 10:13*). By following His law, by living in harmony with the principles He has established, we can be protected from so much unnecessary pain and suffering.

What has been your own experience with the protections and safety that come from obedience? What lessons have you been forced to learn the hard way?

Restoration

By allowing Israel and Judah to be taken captive out of the land that had been covenanted to them, God was, in effect, “divorcing” them (*Jer. 3:8*). However, this wasn’t to be the last word. At first Jeremiah declared that the sounds of joy and gladness and the voices of the bride and bridegroom would be silenced (*Jer. 7:34, 16:9, 25:10*). Later he added that the period of silence would be limited, and once more the sound of bride and bridegroom would be heard in the land (*Jer. 33:11*).

Why would the sound be considered the sound of joy, of mirth, of gladness? What message was the Lord giving His people then—and us today? See also *John 20:21, Phil. 4:4, 1 Thess. 1:6, 1 John 2:12*.

What promises did God make to His unfaithful bride? *Jer. 25:11, 29:10, Ezek. 16:60*.

With the threat of punishment the prophets included a ray of hope. When Jeremiah declared that the sounds of joy and gladness and the voices of the bride and bridegroom would be silenced (*Jer. 7:34, 16:9*), he added later that the period of silence would be limited to 70 years (*Jer. 25:11*). Then their oppressors would be overthrown. Hosea spoke of a period for Israel when there would be no pregnancy, no conception (*Hos. 9:11*), but after this would come a time of healing and love (*Hos. 14:4*). So, God’s action is not really punishment, but discipline.

The prophets urged Israel to return to Yahweh, promising that He would be faithful in accepting them back. They were confident that Israel would return, but the restoration of the relationship can rest only on one condition—that God’s people in returning to Him should abandon their idolatrous ways, obey His commands, and rely completely on Yahweh again.

New Covenant Promises

It's bad enough, a woman being unfaithful to her spouse; yet, the imagery used was that of a woman who sold herself into prostitution. How low! And yet, as we have seen, the Lord was still willing to take Israel back, still willing to forgive, still willing to heal the broken relationship. The Lord promised that He would make atonement for all that Israel has done (*Ezek. 16:63*). Not only would He take them back, but He would do even more for them.

Read **Jeremiah 31:31–37** (see also *Gal. 3:29; Heb. 8:7–13; 10:16, 17*).
What is the message for ancient Israel, and for us today? What hope, what promises, are found there for us?

Not only would the Lord forgive their sins; He promised to write the law in their hearts, to impress it on their minds (*Jer. 31:33*). This text is the foundation of the gospel, the mystery of grace. This is the new covenant, and it forms the foundation of His promises to all who have given themselves to Jesus in faith and obedience.

We might fall, we might sin, we might make mistakes, but thanks to Jesus—and the fullness of what He has done and is doing for us—God will not forsake us. The plan of salvation, at its heart, offers us all forgiveness; no sin is too great, no sinner too bad, that forgiveness can't be found at the foot of the Cross. This was, in its own context, the message that God gave to ancient Israel; and it is, in our context, that of the light shining from the cross of Calvary, the message that the Lord has for His people today. Even if we have “played the harlot,” our loving and caring husband, the Lord, loves us and wants to take us back. He, though, doesn't force us; instead, He draws us with “bands of love” (*Hos. 11:4*).

Have you played the harlot? Have you spurned God's love? His words to you are, “Come back! I will heal and forgive.” The question now is, What is your response?

Further Study: “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy,” pp. 25–38, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4.

“Nor were these the only prophecies upon which the exiles had opportunity to base their hope of speedy deliverance. The writings of Jeremiah were within their reach, and in these was plainly set forth the length of time that should elapse before the restoration of Israel from Babylon. ‘When seventy years are accomplished,’ the Lord had foretold through His messenger, ‘I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.’ Jeremiah 25:12. Favor would be shown the remnant of Judah, in answer to fervent prayer. ‘I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.’ Jeremiah 29:14.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 552, 553.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, talk more about the question of how sin causes people to do irrational and reckless things. How is it that people who know better nevertheless allow themselves to be swept away by their passions? What can we do, if anything, to help someone we see heading down that path?
- 2 Talk about the idea of God’s law being a protection. What does that mean? How does it protect us? What does it protect us from? At the same time, too, why is faithfulness to the law and to the principles of living that God has given us no guarantee that we will not suffer?
- 3 Wednesday’s lesson talked about the joy, happiness, and peace that come from being in a saving relationship with our Lord. Talk about just what it is about serving the Lord that brings joy, happiness, and peace. Let each member share their own experiences. Seek to learn from each other. Why, in a world full of idols (in whatever form they come), is it important to focus on the blessings and good things that we have been given as children of God?

Summary: Though the Israelites failed Yahweh, we must not judge them. After all, how faithful are we—who have them as an example—to our covenant vows to the Lord?

A Fisherman's Prayer

by A. B. ARLOO

The African country of Ghana has a large and vibrant Adventist presence. But unreached areas remain, such as the Afram Plains of eastern Ghana. This region, with nearly impassible terrain and a harsh climate, is difficult to enter. Until recently most of the 1.6 million people living there had never heard the Adventist message. In 2002 a team of Global Mission pioneers entered the Afram Plains to sow the seed of the gospel. One day the evangelists learned that God had, indeed, gone before them to prepare the soil.

Maxwell Vitashi is an old fisherman in the area. One day he paddled his boat upstream for several miles in search of a good catch. But as he dragged in his nets, his boat suddenly capsized, and he was tossed into the swift-flowing waters.

Maxwell swam toward the nearest shore, but the river was wide, and his strength began to fail. He feared that he would die. Although he was not a Christian, he prayed, "God, save me." Suddenly he felt a powerful force push him to a spot between two tree stumps. He grabbed the stumps and hung on, gasping for breath. He looked around. He was utterly alone. His hands grew numb from the cold water, and he wondered whether he would still die in the river. Again he prayed.

From nowhere a boat appeared. Two men paddled toward Maxwell, lifted him from his perch, and settled him into their boat. They paddled toward the riverbank and carried him to the shore, where they gently laid him on the ground. Maxwell heaved a weary sigh. Then he quickly sat up to thank the men who had saved him. They were gone. He scanned the beach and the river, but he found no sign of the men who had saved him.

Maxwell stumbled into the village, where he told everyone what had happened. "Who were the men?" many asked. But Maxwell did not know. He had lived in this region his entire life and had never seen them before.

Maxwell lost his boat that day, but he rejoices that the God of the universe stepped down to save his life and reveal His presence to a humble fisherman who, until then, did not even know God's name.

When the Global Mission pioneers arrived in his village shortly after Maxwell's experience, the fisherman welcomed them and invited his family and friends to listen and learn about the God who heard his desperate prayers.

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This quarter's study, *The Refiner's Fire* by Gavin Anthony, will delve into why we, as Christians who have committed our lives to Christ, also experience suffering. We know Christ Himself was no stranger to suffering. This study will show us that pain, suffering, and loss do not mean that God has abandoned us. But rather, it will show that God gives us meaning and purpose in these difficult times, and, above all, we can trust Him.

Lesson 1—The Shepherd's Crucible

The Week at a Glance:

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

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

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

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

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

Memory Text—*Psalm 23:3*

Sabbath Gem: At times we feel we have been treated unfairly, betrayed, or led into the valley of death as described in our memory text. But God clearly promises to us that He will restore us and use these painful experiences to train us in righteousness.

Lesson 2—The Crucibles That Come

The Week at a Glance:

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

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

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

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

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

Memory Text—*1 Peter 4:12, 13, NIV*

Sabbath Gem: God often allows us to experience difficult circumstances that cause our characters to change, develop, and grow. We need to begin to recognize how God works in our lives to better understand what our response should be.

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