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In 1997 a Nobel Prize–winning physicist made a stir when he wrote, “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless.” Responding to the statement, one astronomer wrote, “Why should it have a point? What point? It’s just a physical system; what point is there?” Another scientist, agreeing, said, “I am willing to believe that we are flotsam and jetsam.”

Flotsam and jetsam? Yet, considering their premise—that we are here by pure chance alone—what other conclusion would they have drawn? After all, we just one day are born; eventually we become aware of ourselves—pain, fear, and hunger often being the first sensations of self-consciousness. Uninvited, life is foisted upon us without asking for it and yet remains difficult to give back if we don’t want it and impossible to retain if we do. We’re given something none sought after, planned for, or acquiesced in; we’re not sure what it is, what it means, or even why we have it; its most real and immediate givens—pain, sorrow, loss, fear—remain inexplicable.

No wonder these scientists, left to try to understand our origins on their own, see it as all pointless, a mere physical system, nothing more.

How thankful we should be, then, that the Lord hasn’t left us on our own regarding our origins. Genesis is God’s revelation to us of those origins, and it presents a view radically different from what most science presents. That science, without revelation, has determined we’re the creation of meaningless and purposeless forces is more than enough proof of how, without revelation, we get it all wrong.

Indeed, contrary to the “scientific” view, which says we’re here
only because of pure chance, the book of Genesis says that we’re here because God created us, that our existence resulted from the purposeful act of a loving and caring God who made human beings “in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). It’s hard to imagine two more conflicting, irreconcilable positions.

But Creation is only the beginning of Genesis. The book teaches us about the Fall, the global Flood, the Tower of Babel, which together help us better understand the nature of the world we have all found ourselves in without any choice of our own.

Most important, though, Genesis also tells the story of Abraham and the patriarchal line that would arise out of him, the one in whom “all the nations” shall “be blessed” (Gal. 3:8, RSV). Genesis doesn’t focus only on the Fall and its results; instead, scattered through its pages are symbols and shadows that point to the great hope of salvation offered to God’s fallen world through Jesus, a hope offered to everyone who, like Abraham, claims it by faith. Or, as Paul, steeped in Genesis, expressed it: “So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Gal. 3:9)—the father of “all who believe” (Rom. 4:11, NIV).

This quarter we’ll get an inspired account of the miracle that created us; we’ll also get, in hints and symbols, the earliest revelations of the miracle that saves us: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

All this is found in Genesis, a book about Creation and Redemption, not “flotsam and jetsam.”

"Born in Germany, the late Arthur J. Ferch immigrated to Australia, where he worked for many years as a pastor, teacher, and administrator."
How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the adult standard edition Bible study guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

► **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants understand and know about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate feeling about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants apply the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.

► **The Commentary** follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.

► **The Inductive Bible-Study Method** emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner’s investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly, understand the passage in context, avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.

► **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach** should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.

► **The Life-Application Approach** demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

*Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it often is possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.*
Foundations

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3).

South African Laurens Van der Post had a rock sitting on his living room table. When asked about the “strange black stone,” he responded that it came from fifteen thousand feet below the surface of Africa. It was sent to him by a friend who, in the accompanying letter, wrote: “This is a symbol of what you and I have tried to build on all our lives.”

We all build upon foundations. In the most literal sense, we build our lives upon the rocks beneath our feet; but in another, we build our lives around the principles that govern us. Atheists, religious fanatics, skeptics, scientists—everyone governs their lives by fundamental principles, whether they acknowledge those principles or not.

As Christians, our principles are found in and through the person of Jesus Christ, the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). And yet, we know about Jesus through the Bible. So the Bible, in essence, works as the foundation for our lives and our faith. And, in a sense, Genesis serves as the “foundation” of the Bible, kind of like the “strange black stone” far beneath the earth that held up the ground immediately beneath Laurens’s feet.

This week, we’ll take our first look at this book, the “bedrock” of the Bible itself.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 7.*
Genesis and the New Testament

The Pentateuch (the first five books found in our modern Bibles) comes from a Greek term for “five.” The five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, provide the foundation for our biblical faith. It would be hard to make much sense of our religion without them.

As the first of these five books—and, indeed, the first book in the Bible itself—Genesis begins with the origin of our world. After all, if we don’t have our origins right, how easy it is to get everything else wrong. If a builder working on the joints of a house gets the joint off by a few degrees right from the start, before long the walls will be crooked and unusable. Thus, Genesis begins with a clear and distinct message about our origins.

Of course, the enemy of souls works hard to turn the world away from the true God. One of his methods is to put doubt in our minds regarding the veracity of the Bible. Genesis itself comes under fierce attack. If he can undermine our faith in it, which is so foundational, how easy for him to undermine our faith in everything else.


Are we going to listen to the critics who come up with all sorts of “evidence” to question the historical veracity of Genesis, or do we follow the lead of those like Jesus and Paul and Peter, who showed unquestioned faith in the book? Indeed, to question the veracity of Genesis means to question the veracity of the New Testament, which time and again refers to Genesis. How reliable could the New Testament be if it were all wrong about Genesis? As we can see, once we start questioning the historical veracity of the Genesis account, the whole edifice of faith crumbles. Which, of course, is exactly what Satan wants.

What other examples can you find of how doubt regarding what might seem like a “small” thing can, if taken to its logical conclusion, lead to doubt about major things, as well? Why, then, should we be so careful regarding our trust in the Bible as the Word of God? After all, once you start doubting the Bible, what’s left?
Key Text: *Genesis* 1:1, 2

Teachers Aims:
1. To establish the authenticity of the book of Genesis.
2. To reveal the presence of God throughout the book of Genesis.
3. To discuss the foundation of our faith as introduced in Genesis.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Foundation of the Bible (*2 Pet. 1:20, 21*)
   A. The beginning of our existence can be found in Genesis.
   B. All of the books of the Bible have their roots in Genesis.
   C. New Testament writers view the Old Testament—including Genesis—as the authentic Word of God.

II. A Revelation of God (*Gen. 1:1, 2*)
   A. Genesis reveals God as the Creator and Ruler of planet Earth.
   B. Genesis reveals the everlasting nature of God.
   C. The intimate relationship between God and humankind can be seen in the book of Genesis.

III. The Foundation of Our Faith in Jesus (*Heb. 11:1-22*)
   A. Genesis points to the coming Messiah.
   B. The patriarchs lived by faith, even from the beginning.
   C. The first Christians had a firm foundation for their faith in Jesus.

Summary: Genesis is the foundation of our existence and of our faith. God’s presence and interaction with human beings are seen throughout the book of Genesis. New Testament writers often refer to Old Testament scriptures, giving evidence of their authenticity.

**COMMENTARY**

The first verses of Genesis introduce a theme that continues throughout the rest of the Bible: God’s creatorship. His creatorship has three aspects. He creates

1. physical matter and life,
2. a special people, and
3. history.

Believing that God’s creative power shapes life, nations, and history inspires trust in His power to save us from sin and moves us to say with David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (*Ps. 51:10*).

**Creator of History**

Most people are aware of the first aspect of God’s creatorship.
The Mighty and Merciful God

The book of Genesis is first and foremost a revelation of God. In Genesis, humanity is given its first written revelation about our Creator and Redeemer.

What do these following passages tell us about God?

*Gen. 1:1*  
_______________________________________________________

*Gen. 7:11*  
____________________________________________________________________

*Gen. 14:19, 22*  
__________________________________________________________________

*Gen. 18:23-33*  
____________________________________________________________________

*Gen. 48:15*  
____________________________________________________________________

The first book of the Bible rings with the might and power of God. He is seen as the Creator, Judge, Exemplar, Sustainer, Most High, Almighty, and Everlasting God. As the Sovereign, He not only exists before everything but also brings everything into existence.

And yet, there’s so much more revealed about God here. Even in some of the Genesis accounts about judgment we can see His mercy; His sufferings over humanity’s sin; His great patience. Before the Flood came, He had Noah preach many long years, giving everyone an opportunity to be saved. Even with Sodom and Gomorrah, despite their great wickedness, He was willing to spare them, if possible. All through Genesis we can see the might and power of a merciful, loving God who, despite His hatred of sin and evil, loves His fallen creatures and seeks to redeem them.

Write one short paragraph about your understanding of what God is like. What does your answer reveal about your view of God? Be prepared to share your answer in class.
The debate over our origins, waged between the theories of Creation and of evolution, confronts us almost everywhere—from the classroom to the legislative hall. The theory of evolution seeks to give a naturalistic explanation to the origins of the physical universe and its life forms, denying the event any supernatural significance. Scripture reminds us, however, that God brought everything into being.

The second aspect of God’s creatorship is less well known. God not only created the first human couple; He brought into being a special people for Himself and continues to create a people in the last days. (This will be explored further in lesson 3.)

The third aspect of God’s creatorship is the least familiar of the three, even to many Christians. The Bible declares that God is Maker not only of heaven and earth but also of the events that transpire in them, especially those things that fulfill the plan of salvation. Starting with His vow to the serpent that Someone “will strike your head” (Gen. 3:15, NRSV), the Lord would shape historical events to fulfill that promise. The Bible is the story of His role as Creator of history.

We find in the book of Isaiah perhaps the clearest associations of God as Creator with His making of history. In Isaiah 41:21-24 the Lord challenges the false gods to prove themselves real by predicting the future. Isaiah 44:8-19 dismisses idols as nothing more than human-made objects, unlike God, who has existed from the beginning and who not only created the physical universe, including the earth, but also controls world events (Isa. 40:22-24). Things can happen only as He permits them. “To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One” (vs. 25, NRSV). The Lord answers His own question by pointing to His creative power. “Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?” (Isa. 44:28, NRSV). The true and one and only God is the Creator of all that is, including human history.

Notice how intimately Scripture links both physical creation and the creation of history. “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, . . . who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing” (Isa. 40:22, 23, NRSV). Here, God ties His creative powers to His ability to control political and world events. Thus, God creates not only the heavens but also the events that take place under them, present and future. Speaking of the future of the nation of Assyria, God declared, “As I have designed, so shall it be; and as I have planned, so shall it come to pass” (Isa. 14:24, NRSV). “For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?” (Isa. 43:1, NRSV). History—here, particularly, prophetic history—is as much a divine creative act as the stretching out of the heavens. “I work and who can hinder it?” (Isa. 43:13, NRSV). Through His creative power He not only blocks false predictions (Isa. 44:24, 25) but “confirms the
Close Encounters

Genesis, we saw yesterday, depicts God as all-powerful, the One who spoke the world into existence, the One who could bring a flood upon the whole earth, and who could rain fire down on rebellious and violent cities. As humans, looking out at the expanse of the creation, how could we not be in awe at the incredible power of the God who created all things?

Yet, the Bible also depicts God as up close and personal; that is, unlike the god of deism, who creates the world and then goes off to leave it on its own, the God revealed in the Bible has been intimately associated with fallen beings. We see this most powerfully in the life and death of Jesus (see Phil. 2:5-8). And yet, even back in Genesis, we are given glimpses of the closeness with which God interacts with His fallen beings. Kind of a nice thought, isn’t it, especially if you view God as loving and compassionate.

In the following examples, how do we see God closely interacting with humanity? What does each account tell us about the character of God?

Gen. 2:7

Gen. 3:8

Gen. 18:17

Gen. 39:21

In what ways have you personally experienced the reality of God’s nearness? In class, share with others what the experience was like and what you learned from it. Do it in a way that will help encourage others who might not yet have experienced the reality of a God who can be so near to us.
word of his servant, and fulfills the prediction of his messengers” (vs. 26, *NRSV*).

The book of Isaiah points to Cyrus as yet another example of God’s power to control history. God begins His introduction of the future Persian leader by asking, “Who has roused a victor from the east, summoned him to his service?” (*Isa. 41:2, NRSV*). The Persian leader accomplishes everything he does through God’s creative activity. The Lord grasps his right hand and gives him the power to conquer other nations (*Isa. 45:1*). The Creator goes ahead of Cyrus to overcome obstacles so that the human leader brings to

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Genesis 2:1, Matthew 5:18, 24:37-41, 2 Timothy 3:16, Revelation 14:7*

1. It has been said that we have to know where we have been in order to know where we are going. This seems especially true in regard to the Genesis story, as it relates to our Christian faith. Why is it so important to have a correct concept of our origins, as put forth in the book of Genesis?

2. Jesus often referred to events in the book of Genesis—many of which often are regarded today as mythical—as historical fact. What is the significance of this to us? How do you think that so many people, who claim to regard Jesus’ words as authoritative, manage to disbelieve the historical authenticity and literal truth of Genesis?

3. The main message of Genesis is the creatorship of God. Is it possible to accept what it says about God being Creator, while ignoring or denying the details of the Genesis narratives? Is it possible that the author of Genesis did not intend it to be taken as literal fact, as some claim? Why, or why not?

4. How do the events of Genesis anticipate or prepare the way for the coming of Jesus? Can Jesus be seen in the Genesis story? Where, and how?

5. What does the New Testament teach us about the Old Testament in general and the book of Genesis in particular? Were the means of salvation available to people in Old Testament times somehow different from the means offered to those living during or after the time of Christ, as some claim? For example, what was the role of faith as opposed to works?
Foundations

In Acts 6 a Jewish believer, Stephen, a man “full of faith and power” who did “great wonders and miracles” (Acts 6:8) was hauled before a council of leaders for preaching and promoting Jesus. Acts 7 then begins with him giving the speech that would, when done, lead to his death by stoning (see Acts 7).

Read the speech of Stephen in Acts 7:2-17 and then answer the following questions:

1. Does Stephen appear to have any questions about the authenticity of the stories he is recounting? What lesson is here for us?

2. Where is he getting these stories from?

3. What’s the purpose of his telling these stories as part of his defense of his belief in Jesus?

If you look at the context, Stephen is being challenged for his preaching that Jesus is the Messiah. And he starts his defense back in Genesis, with the call to Abraham; he then traces the family history from him up through Joseph in Egypt to the founding of the nation of Israel and the building of the temple itself. All of which culminated in the coming of “the Just One” (Acts 7:52), Jesus of Nazareth.

The point is that Stephen uses Genesis as the starting point for the great truths that climaxed in Jesus, “the truth” (John 14:6). These Jews, who formed the core of the church, had a firm foundation for their faith in Jesus—and that was the Holy Scriptures, of which Genesis was the starting point. Hence, we can see the important role this book should play in our own understanding of what we believe, as well.

What are some of the “foundations” in your own life, basic things upon which so much else rests? How firm are these foundations? Are you sure they are firm enough to hold you even during the weightiest of trials?
pass what the Divine One wants him to do for His people (vss. 2-4). God arms Cyrus (vs. 5) and sets in motion forces that will enable the Persian to fulfill the divine plan. And how can the Lord do this? Because He is the only God, the Creator who establishes light and darkness and everything else (vss. 6, 7). He will arouse Cyrus “in righteousness, and . . . will make all his paths straight” (vs. 13, NRSV), because He is the One “who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the Lord, and there is no other” (vs. 18, NRSV). The Lord predicted of Cyrus: “‘He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose’” (Isa. 44:28, NRSV).

Cyrus’s story shows how Scripture links God’s creative power

Witnessing

What family doesn’t have family albums—picture books that chronicle, through fuzzy, out-of-focus snapshots, the events, large and small—that make up the family’s history? Through the years, the books grow in length, covering birthdays, holidays, baptisms, school events, vacations, weddings, and more. The books are treasured and passed on from one generation to another. They are reminders of the blessings, joys, and heartaches that, when blended together, structure and mold the family unit.

This week’s lesson opens up to us our earliest understandings of our royal family heritage. By opening the book of Genesis, we open our heavenly family to images of our Heavenly Father’s character, His boundless love for all created things, His great care and attention to detail, and His love of beauty and order. We learn that from Him, and Him only, all things have their beginning.

It’s true that more than six thousand years have passed since our family began and that our once-perfect existence became distorted by sin as a result of the actions of our first parents. Sadly, sin has caused many family descendants to question our heavenly Father’s role in the Creation story. Much of our world now encourages an alternate view of God and His miracle of Creation. This view rejects the Genesis story and substitutes chance for Divine intervention.

We will counter these challenges to the Creation story by intensively studying our earliest family history found in the book of Genesis. Focusing on God’s words, His character, and His instructions help us to solidify our faith and positively affect those with whom we come in contact. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the people we meet feel that they have encountered Jesus through us? When this occurs, our family album can once again reflect the original and true character of our Creator.
The Just Shall Live by Faith

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17).

Write out your understanding of the above text.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

It’s often heard that in Old Testament times believers in the Lord were saved by works of the law and that after the death of Jesus and the beginning of the Christian church they began to be saved by faith alone. Yet, that’s not Bible teaching, not in the Old or New Testament. According to the New Testament, God’s people lived by faith even from the beginning.

Read Hebrews 11:1-22, an inspired account of the lives of some of those found in Genesis. How does what you read there harmonize with Romans 1:17? As you read about each person, place yourself in their position and ask yourself what it was they were having to take on faith; that is, what they were needing to trust God on. What lessons can you learn from their experiences that can help you with whatever you are going through right now?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

Go back to Hebrews 11:13-16. What are those verses talking about? In what ways can you relate to what’s being said there? Look at your own life and ask, What do my actions say regarding what country I am seeking? What changes might you need to be making in your journey?
with the promises of salvation. The power that God displayed in bringing all things into existence assures us that He also is capable of delivering us from sin. God chose to accomplish this deliverance through Jesus. The New Testament repeatedly declares that our Deliverer is also Creator (John 1:1-3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:1, 2). Through Him Heaven has wrought those events that will forever end sin and redeem those who love God.

### Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Recall a time when you were lost. How did it happen? Did you write down the directions incorrectly or misread a map? How did you find your way to your destination? In Matthew 19:8, as part of His discussion on the equity of divorce, Jesus says, “From the beginning it was not so.” What was He trying to tell His listeners and us? How does personal time in the Scriptures help us find our way through the muddle of current ideologies and belief systems?

**Thought Questions:**

1. History repeats itself. What does this statement tell you about humanity’s ability to learn from its past? In what ways does the list of faithful individuals found in Hebrews 11:1-22 provide a foundation for trust in God? What information did these individuals have that interrupted and prevented their downward spiral toward eternal destruction? How would you share the importance of salvation with a co-worker who may be experiencing a difficult life challenge?

2. “‘And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also . . .’” (Luke 17:26, NKJV). Jesus is sharing an insider’s glimpse into the nature of society in times of crisis, especially before His return. As a class, read Luke 17:26-30. Note its broader context. What does Jesus say before and after these verses? Together, compare our current culture with Jesus’ description of the time of the end. How does knowing our origins, as recorded in Genesis, and our future keep us from the quagmire of doubt? Pray in groups of two, asking God to help you find hope, even in the clutter of uncertain times.

**Application Question:**

Paul recounts Israel’s origins and history in Acts 7:1-15. He highlights key junctures in their journey that should have laid the foundation for faith in Jesus Christ. Spend some personal, quiet time recalling your own faith journey. What people or situations undergirded your belief in the Savior? What obstacles presented themselves along the way? In what ways does your past history impact your future walk with God? How might sharing your story bless someone who is struggling with life and who God is?
**Further Study:**

“The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God’s word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives. By spiritualism, multitudes are taught to believe that desire is the highest law, that license is liberty, and that man is accountable only to himself. . . .


“Night, dark and portentous, is enclosing the Christian world. Apostasy from God’s commandments is evidence of this night, deep, dark, and apparently impenetrable. Systems that make the truth of God of none effect are cherished. Men are teaching for doctrine the commandments of men; and their assertions are taken as truth. The people have received man-made theories. So the gospel is perverted, and the Scripture misapplied. As in the days of Christ, the light of truth is pushed into the background. Men’s theories and suppositions are honoured before the word of the Lord God of hosts. The truth is counteracted by error. The word of God is wrested, divided, and distorted by higher criticism. Jesus is acknowledged, only to be betrayed by a kiss. Apostasy exists, and will enclose the world till the last. Its hideous character and darkening influence will be seen in the maddening draughts dealt out from Babylon.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, Feb. 1, 1897.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Discuss the Ellen White quotes listed above. What kind of influences in your society are working against the authority of the Scriptures? How can we, as a people, protect ourselves and others from these sentiments?

2. In class, read your paragraphs regarding what each person believes God is like. Discuss your answers and what you can learn from each other.

3. Talk about your answer to the question at the end of Wednesday’s lesson. What can you learn from others’ experiences regarding the closeness of God? How would you explain to a non-believer what it means when we say that “God is close” to us?
“In the Beginning . . .”

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Genesis 1.

Memory Text: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:6, 9).

On the topic of human origins, a famous scientist wrote: “We’re here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures.”

The Bible, of course—particularly the first two chapters of Genesis—gives a completely different account of our origins: We’re here only because a loving, benevolent Creator-God purposely created life on earth in a process that took six literal contiguous 24-hour days.

It is pretty obvious that modern evolutionary theory stands in blatant opposition to the biblical account of Creation. If one is correct, the other has to be wrong. Even more so, the Bible offers no wiggle room for theistic evolution or any theories that seek to integrate a long evolutionary process with the work of God in creating life on earth, especially human life. As we’ll study this week, in the creation of the world, particularly humans, it doesn’t appear that God left anything to chance.

Let’s take a look at what the Bible says about origins and see for ourselves that the reason we are here has nothing to do with some fish fin that could, by chance, turn into a leg, and everything to do with the God who spoke the world into existence.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 14.*
“In the Beginning, God . . .”

One could argue that, in many ways, the most important text in the Bible is Genesis 1:1. Out of it and all that it contains flows everything else that we believe as Christians. None of our basic teachings make sense apart from the idea expressed in that verse—an idea that becomes even more pertinent in our day and age, when so many people have been swept away by false science, which explains Creation as the result of natural forces that, by chance, evolved into life on this earth. The Bible, with its first verse, denies that idea completely.

Read the following texts. What’s the common message in all of them?

Exod. 20:11; Job 38:4; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 14:6, 7.

Even more than the process of Creation itself, nature’s Creator remains the primary focus in the rest of Genesis 1. The word God punctuates the 31 verses of this chapter 32 times, a fact that emphasizes God’s role in Creation. The first chapter of Genesis seems to go out of its way to remove any notion of chance in Creation. Also, unlike other ancient polytheisms, which often linked Creation with the battles of ancient deities, Genesis depicts only one God as the sovereign Creator.

The verb translated “created” in verse 1 (bara) appears in the Bible only when it depicts an activity of God. The other common word used when human beings or even God makes or does things is asah. Only God, then, can do the kind of creating that was required to make the heavens and the earth. As humans, we can work within that Creation and do (asah) things with it, but only God could create (bara) it itself.

It’s a fundamental law that nothing created can be greater than its creator. (Try to think of an example.) Hence, when you view the entire creation, not just the earth (the main focus of Genesis 1), and realize that the God who created the universe is greater than the universe, what does that tell you about the power of God? What does it tell you about the sacrifice of this God, who became a human being who died in your stead the death that you deserved?
COMMENTARY

Our Creator is a God of order. The structure of Creation week, as outlined in Genesis, reveals this. God carefully planned every detail of the Creation of our world, from its foundation to its culminating day of rest. Moses wrote this account at a time when ancient people believed far differently. Just how differently can be seen through a comparison of the Creation account with ancient cosmologies that taught that natural, often chaotic, forces originated the world. By contrast, the orderliness of the Creation account has inspired hope from
The Creation

When Genesis 1:1 says that God created heaven and earth, some believe that “heaven” here includes the entire universe. A study of the use of the word heaven in the rest of the chapter shows that’s not what’s meant.

See how the word heaven is used in the rest of the chapter (see especially vs. 20). What, from the context, is the meaning of heaven in Genesis 1?

What does verse 2 tell us about the condition of the earth at the beginning of Creation?

The phrase “without form, and void” depicts an environment without shape, form, and light, and void of plant and animal life; in short, a nonlife-supporting globe. God created by means of a commanding word (vss. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24; compare Ps. 33:6-9) or by using the matter that He already had brought into existence some time before the creation of life on earth. Though the reading of these texts in Genesis doesn’t require a creation out of nothing, God wasn’t dependent upon preexisting matter in order to create the earth. Whatever matter He used to make the earth, He had already at some point in the past created out of nothing because, according to the Bible, God created everything.

Read John 1:3. What point is that verse making, and how does it help us understand these opening verses of Genesis?

In two short verses we are given the essence of our origins: A Creator-God made us from a formless and void earth. Much else remains a mystery that we’ll never understand now. It is, though, a miracle that we’re here at all. Meditate on our existence, on the miracle of Creation, and on all that we owe to God. Write out your thoughts and bring them to class on Sabbath.
the beginning of time that a loving God intended for us to exist by
design, not by accident.

I. Creator of All That Is

The simple biblical declaration that in the beginning God created
is so familiar to us that we do not sense how startling it would have
been to most of those who first heard it in the ancient world. The
ancients had many Creation accounts, but they did not believe that
what we term as the universe, or cosmos, came into existence in the
same sense as the Bible says it does.

Instead, ancient cosmologies taught that the very fabric or structure
of the universe contained within itself the capability to produce gods,
matter, life, and everything else. In some ways the ancient concepts
remind us of modern evolutionary theories that suggest that life came
into being because of the inevitable outworking of natural, physical
laws. (Interestingly, some Egyptologists have traced the concept of
evolution all the way back to ancient Egypt.)

The Mesopotamians believed that after the first god spontaneously
sprang into being, he and the deities he created fought each other to
establish order and supremacy. One account relegates humanity to a
mere by-product of that struggle among the gods. Instead of being cre-
ated to have dominion over the earth as in the Bible (Gen. 1:26),
human beings were made by the higher gods to perform the work that
the lesser gods refused to do.

The ancient Egyptians regarded the origin of the earth and its life
as the inevitable result of natural forces, or laws, in the cosmos itself.
Once the first god emerged from the primeval chaos (described as the
watery turmoil experienced during the annual flooding of the Nile), he
created the other deities and everything else through one of a variety
of processes. One God named Ptah, worshiped particularly in the
ancient Egyptian city of Memphis, spoke everything into existence.
He spoke, and the waters above separated from the waters below.
Additional commands made dry land appear and created living things,
including human beings.

At first glance the story of Ptah might remind us of the biblical
account. But Ptah was quite different from the God of Genesis. First,
he was not eternal and came into being himself through the operation
of blind forces in the universe. The cosmos just happened to have in it
the ability to originate gods. Second, Ptah did not create anything
through any power in himself. When he spoke, he was merely activat-
ing something that was already latent in the cosmos. For example, if
he said the word “tree,” the word had programmed within itself—like
a cosmic DNA or digital code—the capacity to produce a tree when
uttered. Third, neither Ptah nor anything he brought into existence was
eternal. Everything, including the gods themselves, would someday
collapse back into the original chaos from which they had come.

The Bible, however, portrays God as standing outside of, and
The Creation Days

Probably no aspect of the Creation story comes under more attack than the time frame it depicts for the creation of life on earth, culminating in Adam and Eve. Almost throughout the Christian world, where the Bible is supposedly held in high esteem, few accept the Genesis time frame as it reads, with its clear and unambiguous depiction of six literal 24-hour days of Creation. Apparently, evolution—a teaching that at its core denies everything that the Bible stands for and teaches—has made deep inroads even in the Christian community. Jesus once said, in reference to His second coming, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Unless there’s a radical change, He certainly won’t find much faith regarding the Bible’s account of Creation, that’s for sure.

Read through Genesis 1, focusing on the time element in which Creation is depicted. What evidence can you find directly within the chapter itself that shows that literal time was meant? Also, what other texts can you find in the Bible that show it was meant to be literal, not figurative, time? (See, for example, Exod. 20:8-11.)

Read carefully Genesis 1:4, 5. A simple reading of these two verses makes it clear that it is talking about a single day, as we understand a day—half light and half darkness, “day” and “night.” These two elements, the text says, made up “the first day.” These verses, then, are talking about the creation of the 24-hour period we use to mark off each single day. And this account ends with a formula that reads in Hebrew, “And there was evening and there was morning, day one.” That same formula—first used here to mark off explicitly a single day, the creation of this 24-hour time period—is then repeated throughout the rest of the chapter to depict the other days of Creation themselves. “And there was evening and there was morning, day two,” . . . “day three,” and so forth. Hence, within the first few verses the Lord showed us unambiguously that when the Bible says, in Exodus 20, for instance, that “in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth” (vs. 11, NIV), He meant six days, nothing less and certainly nothing more.
above, all creation. He alone is everlasting (Ps. 90:1, 2; 93:2). He is not a natural force at work, a product of creation itself. The Lord creates through power that He personally possesses. He does not have to trigger some latent cosmic law that, once set in motion, automatically makes something spring into existence.

The ancient pagans visualized their gods as manifestations of natural phenomena. Baal, for example, was the god of storms and of

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Genesis* 1:25; 2:2; *Exodus* 20:8-11; *Job* 38:4-7; *Psalm* 8:5-8; *Ecclesiastes* 3:18, 19; *Romans* 8:28-30

1. It is said that if we are to accept the account of human/biological origins that contemporary science puts forth, we must reject important parts of the biblical account. In what ways do the two accounts contradict each other? Could we say, as some do, that God guided the evolutionary process? Why, or why not?

2. Genesis clearly indicates that chance played no part in God’s creation of life, the universe, and everything. Why is this such an important point? What implications does it have for our lives today? Do you see elements of chance in the present world, or does everything happen in accordance with God’s will?

3. There are two possible interpretations of the Creation account in Genesis: that it tells of the creation of the whole universe, or that it tells of the creation of the earth alone. Seventh-day Adventists generally believe that Genesis refers to the Creation of the earth. Which do you believe, and why? Is it important?

4. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that the days referred to in the Creation account are literal, 24-hour days. Why is this particularly important to Seventh-day Adventists? What are the consequences to Seventh-day Adventists of believing otherwise—for instance, that the days are actually indeterminate ages? How would you answer someone who points out that the 24-hour day presupposes, or requires, the existence of the sun and moon, both of which do not appear until the fourth day?

5. Even without believing in evolution, one can identify similarities and family resemblances between humans and animals. Why is that so? In what ways are we similar to the other life forms that share the earth, and in what crucial ways are we different? Why do you think God created living creatures in the order in which He did?
The Chicken or the Egg?

The Genesis Creation account is not simple, which shouldn’t be surprising. After all, the earth and life on earth aren’t simple. We have been given (even with chapter 2 included) about fifty-six verses to explain Creation: Most manuals on how to fix a bicycle are longer. No doubt a lot has been left out. How fortunate that we’ll have an eternity to learn more. We’ll need it.

Nevertheless, there’s still plenty of information there for us to ponder now.

Read through Genesis 1 again; this time focus on the sequence of events. What pattern emerges? How does this pattern make sense in regard to our understanding of the nature of life on earth?

Genesis starts out saying that earth was “without form, and void” (Gen. 1:2). God then proceeded to give our earth form and remove the “void.” If you follow the sequence, at first there’s darkness and then light; this leads to demarcation of day and night. Next, there’s some kind of atmosphere, a “firmament” called “heaven.” Water, it seems, is already there at the time of earth’s creation, which, of course, is needed for life (at least as life exists here). God then brings forth dry land, and then upon the dry land there came vegetation, grass, herbs, trees (all of which needed land first in order to exist) “whose seed is in itself” (vss. 11, 12). This is followed by the presence of the sun and the moon and the visible stars (why these are depicted here, in this manner, in this part of the sequence, is one of those questions we’ll probably have to wait to get answered in heaven). Finally, with all these other things in place, God was able to bring forth creatures, land and sea creatures who were flying and swarming and moving throughout this part of God’s creation, living things who were to “be fruitful, and multiply” (vs. 21) upon the face of the earth. Thus, it seems that, within our limited understanding, the Lord followed a very logical sequence and pattern that resulted in the creation of life here.

Keeping the Genesis account in mind, answer this question: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Justify your answer, and why is that answer (or at least the principles behind that answer) important to our own understanding of just who we are and why we are here?
fertility (the semidesert land of Canaan desperately needed rain to sustain vegetation and other living things). Ra was one of many Egyptian gods who assumed various forms of the sun (which provided light and heat for life). But Scripture constantly declares that the true God is not part of any natural phenomena. He made nature and its forces in the first place.

II. A God of Order

Just as the natural world points to a Creator, the organization of the biblical account of our origins points to a deliberate, intentional Creation. Genesis 1 is carefully structured, perhaps to make it easier to remember at a time when few people could read and most people committed important information to memory. The six days of active Creation divide into two parallel halves. During the first three days God establishes the settings for what He will create later, and during the second three days He fills them with their inhabitants.

Witnessing

How many parents, when holding a new baby in their arms, after counting toes and fingers, examining tiny feet and hands, and gently touching the perfectly shaped head, say, “Isn’t chance wonderful! Look how (s)he has morphed into something resembling human form. We avoided fins, scales, and multiple limbs this time. Look at what 10 million years of evolution can produce!”

How foolish it is to think that this healthy and unblemished child is a product of chance. What an impossible stretch of the imagination to believe that only time is responsible for this replica of human parents. Accepting the Creation story by the exercise of faith is easier than leaving everything to the unknown and unpredictable.

Our heavenly Father has instructed us to protect His creations. Shielding planet Earth as much as possible from destructive practices is something we can, and should, do with help from our neighbors, friends, co-workers, and other concerned citizens. By working with others, we not only improve our own physical, mental, and emotional well-being, but we also have the perfect opportunity to share our spiritual beliefs in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and friendship. Working toward a common environmental goal creates a natural bond that allows for deeper discussion of spiritual matters, when appropriate. Recycling, renewing, replanting, and reusing shows our commitment to God’s instructions, our respect for the earth, and our love for our fellow human beings. Make it a priority to get involved. Our spirituality, as well as life on earth, positively will be impacted by such efforts.
The Creation of Humanity

**Compare** the creation of the animals to the creation of Adam. What are the similarities? See Gen. 1:24; 2:7, 19.


In contrast to the creation of the animals and Adam, how was Eve created? Gen. 2:21-24.

As stated yesterday, there’s so much about Creation not revealed in the Scriptures. But enough is revealed to show the special place of humanity (notice in Genesis 1:27 that the generic term man included both male and female; it takes two different sexes to define what is meant by human) in the Creation story. Only after God had everything else perfectly in place did He create Adam (whose name in Hebrew is very closely related to the word for “ground”), and only after him did He create Eve. Despite some similarities between these humans and the beasts, the Bible makes a clear distinction between them. Also, as with the creation of everything else, Genesis knows nothing about chance in the formation of humanity. On the contrary, the systematic pattern of Creation, expressed in repeated formulas (“and God saw,” “and God said,” “let there be”) in a repeated time frame (“and there was evening and morning . . .”), culminating in the intimate act of creating both the man (Gen. 2:7) and the woman (vss. 21-24), show that God left nothing to chance.

**Read** Genesis 1:26, 27. What does this idea of humanity being made in God’s image mean? What are the differences between human beings and other earthly creatures—differences that might help us better understand the unique place we have? Also, think about Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, and the death of Jesus only for human beings as opposed to the animals, which also have suffered from the consequences of sin. How does the Cross help us understand our special place in the creation of the earth? How should this understanding impact how we view others, and ourselves?
Creation week begins with chaos (Gen. 1:2) and ends with the tranquility of Sabbath rest (Gen. 2:2, 3). Or to put it another way, Creation week moves from a time of chaos to holy time. As God creates, He fills both time and space with His holy presence. In many ways one could say that the Sabbath not only completes Creation week but is its goal. From watery waste on the first day to Sabbath rest in an Edenic paradise on the seventh day, the structure of Creation week reflects the careful working of an orderly God.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** What have you made recently? What components or ingredients did you use? Where did they come from? A store? your garden? Quote the memory text, Psalm 33:6, 9, as a group. What does it mean, “For he spake, and it was done” (vs. 9)? How does this compare with your creative endeavor?

**Thought Questions:**

1. When an automobile factory builds a car, it carefully has to decide on the order, or sequence, in which the parts will be assembled. Read Genesis 1, focusing on God’s choice of creative events. Especially note that God made the habitat for His creatures first; He formed then filled. What does this tell you about His wisdom and His concern for each living thing?

2. As you look back on your creative efforts, how long did it take to make the object you were constructing? How did the time spent make a difference in the quality of the finished project? More time invested, in human endeavors, usually reflects a higher quality product. Now consider the time frame for Creation: “The evening and the morning were the first day” (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Why does this short time frame say wonderful things about God? What does this say about His ability to meet the needs in your life or in that of a friend’s?

**Application Question:**

Read Genesis 1 again, as a group. Define “it was good” (vss. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) in contrast to “it was very good” (vs. 31). Note when and how often these phrases were used in the Creation account. What does this tell you about God’s feelings toward humanity? Compare this to the theory of evolution’s concept of humankind’s origins and relationship to other living things. Covenant as a Sabbath School class to spend time next week discussing, with at least two friends, colleagues, or neighbors, the immeasurable value of each individual. Next Sabbath, plan to begin your introductory class time reporting on your experiences.
Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 44, 45; *Education*, pp. 15–18; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 1.

“When Adam came from the Creator’s hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. . . . It was His [God’s] purpose that the longer man lived the more fully he should reveal [His] image—the more fully reflect the glory of the Creator.” —Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 15.

Discussion Questions:

1. Most of us were taught that atoms, made up of tiny particles such as protons, neutrons, and electrons, are the smallest building blocks of the universe. A new theory states that these particles are actually made of tiny vibrating strings (a string is to the size of a proton as a proton is to the size of the solar system!). Though it’s still only a theory, think about the idea of these vibrating strings (different vibrations bring about different particles) in light of the teaching that God “spoke” the world into existence.

2. Discuss Genesis 1:28 and the teaching that God has given humanity “dominion” over the earth. What does that mean? What responsibilities does that entail? How can we as a church and as individuals better fulfill that responsibility?

3. The Bible teaches a supernatural origin of our world. How does that idea help us better understand the reality of a supernatural end of this world?

4. Plan a trip with your class to go out in nature and explore the wonders of creation. If possible, bring along some people who don’t yet know Jesus and the wonderful plan of salvation. See what you all can learn, believers and unbelievers, about God through His created works.
The Early Earth

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Genesis 2.

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

Having dealt with how all of Creation came into being, Moses now focuses on human beings and their immediate environment. While Genesis 1 answered the question How did it all originate? Genesis 2 explains why we are what we are. Without the information provided by Genesis 2, the test of allegiance to God and the subsequent Fall described in Genesis 3 would, to a large extent, be unintelligible.

The intimate world of Adam and Eve surrounded by trees and animals in a garden complements the previous majestic account of Creation. Chapter 2 introduces the reader of the Bible to the social dimensions of humanity and gives some insight on prehistory and the original geography of the world.

Genesis 2 also deals with such divine institutions as Sabbath, work, home, and marriage. Given to the human race before the Fall, these institutions lie at the basis of human existence, conduct, and happiness even today. Though we are, indeed, a long way from Eden, it still presents a model, a template of principles, for we who are on the periphery of Eden restored. What messages are found in this divine account of a prefallen world for the rest of us, we who have known only a fallen existence?

This week we’ll take a look at, literally, paradise, one of the few we’ll ever see, at least for now.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 21.
The Sabbath  (Gen. 2:1-3)

Last week we saw a progression in the Creation account: from darkness to light, from only water to earth and water, to an atmosphere, to vegetation, and so forth, culminating in the creation of human beings, first the man and then the woman. Only after all these things were created do we get the words in Genesis 2:1—“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” God’s work of Creation, at least as attested to here, was a finished work. This notion is implied in Genesis 2:2, 3, where both verses say that God “rested” from His work. Was God tired, or did He rest because His work was completed?

**Read** Genesis 2:2, 3 and answer the following questions:

1. **Is there anything in the texts that implies that Creation was an ongoing process that continued after the sixth day? What are the implications of your answer?**

2. **Considering what the Sabbath stands for, the Creation, how do these verses already imply the universality of the Sabbath; that is, its meaning for all humanity?**

Although the noun *sabbath* is not mentioned in Genesis 2, the verb for “rested,” from which the term *sabbath* is derived, proves that the Sabbath is meant (*see Exod. 20:8-11*). Just as six literal days came before it, the Sabbath is a literal day, as well.

Notice, too, that the first thing God declared holy was time, the seventh day. Not a hill, not a river, not a shrine, but a segment of time itself was the first thing in God’s new Creation specifically “set apart” (another way of expressing “to be made holy”). Thus, we see the Sabbath as something special, something universal, something not bounded by the limits of place or geography but as something that can reach every human being no matter where they live.

*Next time you welcome in the Sabbath, dwell on the fact that you are keeping a day that goes all the way back to Eden, to the first week of human existence. How does that make you feel, linking yourself in such a tangible way to your origins?*
Key Text: Genesis 2:1-4

Teachers Aims:
1. To discuss life on earth before the Fall.
2. To show that the Sabbath stands as a memorial to Creation.
3. To reveal that the human race forfeited immortality through sin.

Lesson Outline:

I. Life on Earth (Gen. 1:28-30, 2:3)
   A. God instituted the Sabbath at Creation; neither time nor space limit it.
   B. God entrusted human beings at Creation with rulership of earth.
   C. God ordained a plant-based diet in Eden for animals and for our first parents.

II. The Living Soul (Gen. 2:7)
   A. God created Adam as a living soul, comprised of body and spirit.
   B. Because of sin, humanity no longer has the quality of immortality but is subject to death.

III. Life in the Garden (Gen. 2:8)
   A. Eden was a specific place on earth, rather than a mere symbol.
   B. Sin marred the labor of Adam, making it toilsome. God originally intended work to be invigorating and enjoyable.
   C. God created Eve the equal of Adam, for companionship and to share in his work in the Garden.

Summary: God breathed the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils, and he became a living soul, made up of body and spirit. After the Fall, the human race lost the right to eat of the tree of life and suffered the grievous consequences of sin.

COMMENTARY

God created the first human beings then rested on the Sabbath. This association of God’s people with the Sabbath begins a pattern that continues throughout the rest of the Bible. From the beginning of time down to the end, the Sabbath repeatedly becomes a symbol of God’s power to restore His people.

The Sabbath and God’s People

Though humanity rebelled from Eden onward, God still sought a people for Himself. After the Flood He called Abram to begin that people. Eventually His people went into Egypt, where slavery almost destroyed them. The Lord had to instill in them a sense of identity as His people. As He led them through the wilderness, He assured them that He would care for them through the gift of manna (Exod. 16:13-36). Their obedience during the manna cycle and their rest on the Sabbath became a test of their acceptance of God as their
**Nephesh Hayyah**

In Genesis 2, the scene shifts from the Creation of the world to a local garden. Rather than being a second and different Creation narrative, Genesis 2 complements Genesis 1. Human beings are the pinnacle of the pyramid in Genesis 1. In Genesis 2 they become the center of the circle. The spotlight falls on the human race, and everything else is relegated to the background.

Back in Genesis, it wasn’t until the fifth day that God created “living creatures,” from the Hebrew *nephesh hayyah*. Hayyah here means “life,” and *nephesh* means “creature.” Interestingly enough, that same phrase appears in 2:7.

**Read** Genesis 2:7. What phrase seems most likely in the text to have been translated from *nephesh hayyah*?

_______________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________

Most people are surprised to learn that the phrase often translated “living soul” (Gen. 2:7) in the creation of humanity is the same one used to describe fish and birds and other creeping things. Though unlike these other creatures, humanity was made in the “image of God” (Gen. 1:27); in a purely physical sense humanity is tied to other life on earth. And, of course, we see this in the sense that, like other life on earth, we need certain physical things in order to stay alive.

**How** does this use of the word *nephesh* in Genesis 2:7 (often translated “soul”) help us understand why the soul isn’t immortal? (Ezek. 18:4, Matt. 10:28).

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Though the Bible uses the word *nephesh* in numerous ways, denoting a variety of ideas (“person,” “self,” “life,” or “being”), it never means in the Old Testament the popular notion of some separate conscious immortal entity that can exist apart from the body. That’s a pagan Greek idea that has filtered into almost all monotheistic religions today.

**Make a list of the common popular deceptions that arise from belief in an immortal soul. Why should one who understands the truth about the soul be so grateful that he or she does understand? What does that knowledge protect you from?**
Lord and of themselves as His people.

At Sinai God declared them a “holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). They now existed only because He delivered them from bondage (Exod. 20:2, Deut. 5:15), and He created them as a people. There, He proclaimed the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath one. Observance of the Sabbath became a symbol of their acknowledgment of their peoplehood.

Not only was the Sabbath prominent in the formation of God’s people, it also surfaces in Scripture whenever they face the threat of destruction, assimilation, or dispersion. For example, 2 Kings 11 tells how Athaliah, the queen mother of Judah’s king Ahaziah and daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel, usurped control of Judah after her son’s death. She tried to destroy all members of the royal family. But Ahaziah’s sister, Jehosheba, managed to save Ahaziah’s son, Joash, and hide him in the temple precincts for six years. In the seventh year Jehoiada, the high priest, staged a coup to remove Athaliah from power and place Joash on the throne. The coup took place on the Sabbath (2 Kings 11:5-9). After the execution of Athaliah, Jehoiada made “a covenant between the Lord, the king, and the people, that they should be the Lord’s people” (vs. 17, NKJV).

The regular changing of the guard on Sabbath allowed Jehoiada to assemble all of the temple forces without attracting immediate suspicion, and one could dismiss the reference to the Sabbath as just that. The Bible rarely goes into great detail about anything, especially without reason. Its literary style is extremely terse and includes only what the author considers vital. Thus, when Scripture does mention what at first might seem to be a minor point, we must pay special attention to it. The author of 2 Kings could have described the coup without stating on what day it took place. Scripture seldom states what day something happened. By mentioning the Sabbath along with the making of a covenant, the author directs our attention back to the Sinai experience. The people whom Athaliah had almost destroyed through her pagan activities are now reconstituted and brought back into relationship with God.

Likewise, the book of Isaiah speaks much about the Sabbath. It shows how resident aliens and eunuchs—both outsiders or at least second-class citizens—can, through observance of the Sabbath, become part of God’s people (Isaiah 56). Sabbath observance also forms part of the prophet’s discussion of true worship (Isaiah 58), and true worship consists of a proper relationship with God and with fellow humanity. Isaiah also declares that God’s people will go into exile because of their national rebellion, but when He restores them with the rest of humanity in a new earth, they will from Sabbath to Sabbath worship the Lord (Isa. 66:22, 23).

Just before the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah also emphasized the Sabbath (Jer. 17:19-27). Judah faced extinction as a nation and even as a people. If they would honor the
The Garden Home *(Gen. 2:8-17)*

The specific geographical details presented in verses 10 through 14 indicate that, in the mind of the Bible writer, Eden was a specific locality rather than merely being a symbol or a metaphor. Several of the names mentioned in verses 11 through 14 are later applied to post-Flood localities and rivers. However, the Flood changed the surface features of our planet so radically that identification of pre-Flood geography with places and rivers known to us is impossible.

**What** elements mentioned in verses 8 through 17 indicate that the garden home was an ideal model? (Note particularly the setting and the attention given to humanity’s physical, mental, aesthetic, and moral needs.)

Even today, with a world ravaged by six thousand years of sin, we can get hints of what the original beauty must have been like. Traces remain, and they speak to us of God’s wonderful creative power *(Job 12:7-9; Rom. 1:19, 20)*. It’s hard to imagine what Eden must have looked like and what a paradise it must have been.

**What’s** the closest thing to paradise that you’ve ever seen? What made it like paradise? In what ways does it parallel what Eden, or the earth as a whole, must have been like?

Read Genesis 2:15. How interesting that Adam, even in this earthly paradise, with everything he could possibly need, was given the task of working in the garden. The Hebrew word translated “dress” is a common term meaning to “work” or to “serve.” Thus, even before the Fall, even before sin, humanity wasn’t to sit idle but to work. This alone should get rid of the notion that work itself is somehow bad.

**Though we’re a long way from Eden, what practical things could you do now to make your environment more like Eden for yourself and those around you? What changes would need to be made?**
Sabbath, however, Jerusalem would be inhabited forever (vss. 24-26). But they refused to listen to the prophet.

References to the Sabbath also appear during the Exile and afterward. Ezekiel sketches the history of God’s people before announcing that He will restore Israel, bringing them back from exile (Ezekiel 20). Twice Ezekiel mentions that the Sabbath was a sign or symbol of God’s relationship to them as a people (vss. 12, 20).

When some of the exiles did return from Babylon, the Sabbath again made its appearance in Scripture. As Nehemiah works to restore the identity of religious life in Jerusalem, he finds that its inhabitants, in league with the pagan people around them, have turned the Sabbath into just another market day (Neh. 13:15-22). The passage specifically

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Genesis 2:3; 9:1-7; Ecclesiastes 3:20, 21; Isaiah 65:17-23; 1 Timothy 2:13, 14

1. What does the seventh day, the Sabbath, tell us about God and the role of Creation? In what sense was His work complete? What does God’s consecration of the Sabbath tell us about His regard for that day and what our attitude should be toward it?

2. The Hebrew phrase *nephesh hayyah* is translated as “living soul” in most versions of the Bible. What popular misconceptions are attached to the word *soul*? In light of these misconceptions, do you think that the use of the word is misleading? What word, if any, would you use in its place? What does the Bible really teach about the soul?

3. Citing Genesis 3:19, many argue that work is a curse arising from the Fall from Eden. Perhaps, in one sense, it is. Yet, before the Fall, Adam is told in Genesis 2:15 to work in the Garden. Why is work in one instance a curse but in the other a blessing? Can work be a blessing today? Explain.

4. Why do you think Genesis emphasizes that woman, Eve, came from man, Adam? Could it be used to justify belief in female inferiority? Why, or why not? What was God really trying to say?

5. In some ways, the world of Eden was quite different from ours yet in other ways quite recognizable. What things do we still share with the original couple? Can Eden still serve as a model for the ways in which we live our lives as Christians, and if so, to what extent?
The Woman in Adam’s Life (Gen. 2:18-25)

Here’s Adam, in a garden paradise, with rulership over the animals, with everything at his disposal except one tree (see Gen. 2:16, 17). And yet, still God has more for him.

What was God’s purpose in giving woman to man? Gen. 2:18, 20.

The woman was to be a “help meet for him” (the Hebrew suggests a “helper over against him,” “a help equal to him,” “his counterpart”). The Genesis record places value on woman as an equal, a counterpart, a partner, or a complement in whose company man finds his fullest satisfaction and with whom he shares God’s image and likeness.

Read Genesis 1:27, 28. How do these two verses together show the important role the woman was to have in life on earth?

Considering the basic physical makeup of Adam, he couldn’t fulfill the command given in Genesis 1:28 without a woman, could he? Though the woman was to be his companion, wife, and co-worker in subduing and having dominion over nature, she was to be so much more, as well (see Gen. 2:24).

How was Eve created? Gen. 2:21, 22. What distinguished her creation from that of all other living things?

Everything else, including man, came out of the dirt; Eve came out of man. Though the Bible doesn’t explain just what that difference means, it certainly shows that she wasn’t to be treated as an inferior to him. Sadly, in so many societies, women are treated almost as slaves, afforded little dignity and few rights, a powerful example of what sin has done to the human race.

Have you, either as a man or woman, acquired from your culture (maybe even subconsciously) some of the wrong attitudes about women? How could what’s taught in Genesis 2 help change these attitudes?
mentions non-Israelites—Tyrians—who are bringing in fish and other 
merchandise and are using the Sabbath as their business day (vs. 16).

The context of the incident is the danger of assimilation that threat-
ens the people of Jerusalem. Non-Israelites were moving into the city 
and even the temple precincts (vss. 1-9). Many of God’s people, 
including one of the sons of the high priest, had non-Israelite wives 
(vss. 23-30). The children could not even speak their fathers’ lan-
guage. God’s people were vanishing as an identifiable group. To stop 
the destructive process, Nehemiah stressed the Sabbath as a symbol of 
their identity as God’s people and of their allegiance to Him.

In the New Testament God’s people swung to the other extreme. 
The rigid Sabbath observance of many turned it into a barrier that iso-
lated their witness to the other nations. Jesus in His Sabbath miracles

Witnessing

The Sabbath . . . a day like any other? Hardly.

What would you say the Sabbath is made for? Do you see it as 
precious hours set aside for reflection, a result of God’s deep 
understanding of our need for wind-down time? An opportunity to 
“stop and smell the roses”? Quality time to be spent with family 
and friends? Twenty-four hours in which to lay aside everyday hass-
els and free the mind and spirit to commune with our heavenly 
Father? An occasion to draw strength from our personal commun-
ion with Him in order to better face the week to come?

One thing that we can all agree on is what a special and unique 
day it is, created specifically to address the spiritual and temporal 
needs of human beings. The Bible tells us, “The Sabbath was made 
for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). It is a day of 
rest made to bring us pleasure and, at the same time, is good for us.

Equally important, how we spend the hours of the Sabbath is 
noticed by those around us. We silently witness to others by what 
we do and, most notably, what we fail to do. Each person may have 
definite ideas on what is and is not an appropriate Sabbath activ-
ity. When contemplating a Sabbath-day activity, ask the question, 
“Would Jesus do this with me?” If the answer is no, save it for 
another day. If the answer is yes, invite others to share it with you. 
Individuals who know little to nothing about the sacredness of the 
Sabbath can learn a great deal from your observance. If they see 
you mowing your lawn, washing your car, or hanging out your 
laundry, their impression will be that Saturday, the Sabbath, is a 
day like any other. If, on the other hand, you invite them to join you 
in worship, in taking a long nature walk, or in spending time 
searching the Scriptures for answers, they will come to understand 
that the seventh day is unlike any of the other six. They will under-
stand that it is special, a genuine gift to be treasured.
Eve Becomes Adam’s Wife  *(Gen. 2:23, 24)*

In Genesis 2:23, Adam was so rapt that he expressed his triumphant welcome of his wife in poetry (verse 23 is the first poetic couplet in Scripture). The creation of Eve and her and Adam’s subsequent marriage were designed to be a great blessing. One man, with one woman, were to form the foundation of the home, the basic unit out of which all human life was to spring and then exist. This model was how they were, indeed, to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” *(Gen. 1:28).*

**What** has sin done to this ideal? What common things occur now that deviate from it? What have been the results?

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**What** steps in marriage are outlined in the words of God, and in what order are these steps to occur? *Gen. 2:24.*

________________________________________________________________________

God’s ideal for marriage is expounded in this verse. When the time came to leave those closest to him, his parents, man’s first earthly loyalty was to be to his wife. She was to occupy the foremost place in his affections. In God’s order the union of bodies between husband and wife is to follow their commitment in marriage. The biblical order “leave . . . cleave . . . and they shall be one flesh” tragically and defiantly has been turned upside down, with tragic results.

**What** kind of intimate relationship between husband and wife does Scripture uphold long after the Fall? *1 Cor. 7:2-5, Eph. 5:21-29, Heb. 13:4.* What principles do you find in these verses that reflect what marriage was like before the Fall? And, most important, if married, what can you do to better reveal these principles in your own home?

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sought to remove all trappings that would discourage others from joining God’s people. When God makes His final plea for those who want to be His people, the Sabbath will again play the role it has had from the beginning in restoring and strengthening their identity.

Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Think back on a significant project you have undertaken and completed. If you took pictures as the house or sculpture or academic degree progressed, what are your feelings now when you see them? What did you do when you were finished with the project? What kind of celebration did you have when you were done? God undertook an amazing, God-sized project. “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished.” And God rested, blessed, and sanctified (Gen. 2:1-3). How does what He did when the world and its inhabitants were created affect and bless your life?

**Thought Questions:**

1. A working prototype of an automobile requires a functional power train, as well as an attractive exterior design. Genesis 2:7 reveals so much about humanity’s design. “God formed . . . a living being” (NKJV) or “living soul” by combining dust and “the breath of life.” Bring modeling clay to class and invite the class members to shape a model of a human. Discuss the difference between your sculpture and God’s creation. Why are you thankful for a Creator God?

2. How do you feel about rules? Read Genesis 2:15-25. Imagine Adam and Eve walking in the Garden for the first time, discovering its wonders as God gave them a guided tour. Discuss what you imagine they must have felt when God said, “‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gen. 2:16, 17, NKJV). How do you think their response to this new rule differs from our response to rules? As a class, invite God to help you view His commands as blessings that protect and give purpose to your life.

**Application Question:**

What do you think of when someone says “garden”? Are your thoughts of dirt and weeds or flowers and produce? Share the life experiences that provided the foundation for your response. Consider Genesis 2:4-15. What did God offer humankind when He gave them a garden home? In what ways can we recapture Eden’s environment for our families, even in a sinful world? Ask your family to join you in designing a haven of peace and interaction.

“The home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth. That home, beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace. . . . God placed Adam in a garden. . . . In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. . . . Pride and ambition are never satisfied, but those who are truly wise will find substantial and elevating pleasure in the sources of enjoyment that God has placed within the reach of all.” —Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 49, 50.

“Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

1. How are we today to understand the words in Genesis 1:27, 28 about the man and woman subduing and dominating the earth? What might that have meant then, before sin, and now, after sin? What message does that have for us today in how we relate to our environment?

2. How does your society treat women? What practical things can you do, if necessary, to help women who are being mistreated? What can and should your local church be doing that it’s not doing now?

3. Are there some marriages in trouble in your church? What can you do, as a class, in a very practical manner, to help support those going through this painful turmoil?
Paradise Lost

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 3:1–4:26.

Memory Text: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

In the 1600s, British writer John Milton wrote his famous poem, Paradise Lost, about the fall of our parents in Eden. Using a powerful imagination, Milton said that he sought, with this poem, to “justify the ways of God to man.” In it, Milton painstakingly described not only the garden bliss of Eden (“flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose”) but Satan’s ruse to bring Adam and Eve’s demise, all part of his bitter struggle against God (“Better to reign in hell,” Satan says, “than serve in heaven”).

Of course, we know what happened; after the serpent’s long beguiling speech to Eve, “her rash hand in the evil hour/Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate.” And the rest, as they say, is history.

Fortunately, we know not only the past but the future and God’s promise of Redemption. According to Milton’s poem, “the Son of God freely offers himself a ransom for man,” which is what the Bible says, as well (1 Tim. 2:5, 6), and with that offer comes the hope of eternal life for all who accept it.

This week we look not at Milton’s poem but at the original account that inspired it, the Fall as revealed in Genesis, and from it learn not only about the disaster of the Fall but the hope of Redemption.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 28.
The Serpent

Genesis 3:1 introduces a new and, considering what came before, unexpected element—the serpent. Though the things that “creepeth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:25) were not specifically named, a serpent surely could have been among them. It probably wasn’t even extraordinary that the serpent appeared in the Garden. However, that it was talking and that it enticed Eve toward evil, that’s a new element not explained by anything in the previous two chapters, in which everything created was “very good” (vs. 31).

How do these texts, taken together, help us understand more about that serpent, who he really was, and why he appeared? Job 1:6-11, Isa. 14:12-14, Ezek. 28:14-17, Mark 1:13, Luke 10:18, John 8:44, 2 Cor. 2:11, 11:3, 1 John 3:8, Rev. 12:9, 20:2.

If someone were to have had only the first chapters of Genesis, they would have no understanding of who this serpent was and how he appeared in God’s perfect creation. How could he speak? Why did he seek to deceive Adam and Eve? How did he get there?

What this shows is how important it is for us to use the whole Bible in order to understand truth. The appearance of the deceiving serpent implies a whole other scenario not revealed in the first two chapters of Genesis. (It does hint at it though. Where?) To understand better what was going on, people needed more revelation. In time, God provided it.

Also, one of the more unfortunate consequences of living in the modern age has been the tendency to downplay the reality of Satan, to make him simply a symbol for evil. It’s considered foolish actually to believe in a literal, personal supernatural evil being. Popular culture has in many minds made him into nothing but another Hollywood figure, along with Batman, Spiderman, and Superman. Of course, that’s always been Satan’s tactic, to hide himself. In the Garden, he hid behind the serpent; today, he has more sophisticated methods. However he does it, the results are the same: People are deceived, at the peril of their eternal lives.

Do you ever find yourself doubting Satan’s existence? If so, how can you be protected against this deception?
**Key Text:** *Genesis 2:17, 3:6*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To reveal the serpent as a great deceiver.
2. To explain that sin has immediate results and consequences, as well as long-range ones.
3. To show the effects of sin in the lives of Adam and Eve and in the lives of their children.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Deception in the Garden** *(Gen. 3:1, 4)*
   A. Satan appears in the guise of a serpent in order to deceive Eve.
   B. The serpent uses deception to appeal to Eve’s intellect, physical senses, and emotional nature.
   C. Adam and Eve disobey God’s explicit command not to touch or to eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the Garden.

II. **The Immediate Results of Sin** *(Gen. 3:7, 8)*
   A. Guilt and shame cause the first couple to hide from God.
   B. Man and woman experience the immediate consequences of their disobedience.
   C. Alienation, hostility, and hard labor are some of the first results of sin.

III. **Life After the Fall** *(Gen. 3:15)*
   A. After the Fall, God gives Adam and Eve a glimpse of the hope of salvation through Christ.
   B. Genesis points to the conflict to come between good and evil.
   C. The experience of Cain and Abel is one of the first accounts of the catastrophic results of sin.

**Summary:** Through the influence of the great deceiver, Eve chooses to disobey an express command given by God. She persuades Adam to do so, as well. As a result, Adam and Eve suffer the grave and inevitable consequences of their actions.

**COMMENTARY**

“Take, eat.” Just two small words. And through them sin came into the world. The serpent who first spoke those words to Eve has been enticing the human race with them ever since. What were the consequences to our first parents and to their children of heeding those words (and ultimately, to us)? We will look at these questions in the context of the stories of Adam and Eve and of Cain and Abel. Most important, we will look at the provisions that God made to uplift us from the Fall.

I. **Wise as Gods**
   Eve eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because she thinks it will make her “wise” *(Gen. 3:6)*. The serpent tells her that...
The Fall (Gen 3:1-6)

**How** clear had been God’s command to Adam? How did the tempter seek to confuse the issue with his question and obscure the exact meaning of God’s stipulation? *Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:1.*

**According** to Eve, what additional command, not recorded in Genesis 2:17, did the holy pair understand? *Gen. 3:3.*

**Having** first questioned the divine stipulation, to what did the serpent now resort? *Vs. 4. (Compare John 8:44.)*

Satan started out by mixing truth and error; once the bait was taken, he resorted to full-fledged error, blatantly contradicting God’s explicit command. How often things work like that even today. Someone starts out with a doctrine, a teaching, that contains both truth and error but, later, when taken to its logical conclusion, it winds up as pure error. How crucial that we always be on our guard!

Genesis 3:6 states the reasons Eve ate the fruit anyway. It appealed to her physical (food), aesthetic (pleasant to the eyes), and intellectual (makes one wise) nature—a nature that God had given her. In other words, Satan took the gifts that God gave Eve and used them against her. If this worked so well with an unfallen being in Paradise, how much more so with fallen creatures?

**What** do these verses say to us in the context of our fallen natures? *Rom. 13:14; Phil. 3:18, 19; 1 John 2:16.*

The reality of sin, of temptation, of the lure of the flesh, is an ever-present reality in the lives of all humans. The difference, however, is not to be enslaved to physical, mental, or even intellectual passions.

Make a list of texts that you could give to a Christian who feels weighed down and discouraged over his or her spiritual or moral state. What do they say, and what hope is found in them?
its fruit will make her “like God, knowing good and evil” (vs. 5, RSV). The phrase “good and evil” is a totality, meaning everything. Strangely, Eve disbelieves God’s warning about what would happen if she were to consume the forbidden fruit; yet, she craves His attributes. Just as strange is the fact that she eats the fruit when both she and Adam already have a likeness to God (Gen. 1:26, 27). Nothing makes sense when it involves sin. Impulsively she “took” and “ate” (Gen. 3:6), two verbs with powerful consequences. Wanting Adam to join her quest to be a god, she gives him some of the fruit, and he eats too. Paul writes that Adam is not deceived (1 Tim. 2:14) when he eats the fruit. Inspiration tells us that he is not even hungry. He understands the full significance of his act of disobedience.

The serpent is partly right in what he tells Eve. Sin always has a grain of truth in it, because evil is always a distortion of something that was originally good. The serpent says that she will gain new knowledge. And she does. Both she and her husband now intimately know guilt, shame, fear, and a host of other things that they suddenly realize it would have been better never to have learned. The couple become aware that they are “naked.” That sense of nakedness is a feeling not just of embarrassment but of fear (Gen. 3:10). Nakedness in the Bible means far more than being unclothed. The biblical symbol suggests weakness, neediness, and helplessness (Deut. 28:48; Job 1:21; Isa. 58:7; Rev. 3:17, 18). Clearly, the knowledge of the effects of sin and evil are better left to Divinity than to finite human beings.

The human couple make pathetic attempts at self-concealment (Gen. 3:7). Out of His compassion God replaces their futile efforts with His own provision for them (vs. 21). And so it is today. God covers our nakedness with His glory and righteousness. The new knowledge of sin does not cover Adam and Eve with glory but leaves them exposed to shame. The human race would have to live with the fatal consequences of that knowledge until Someone else would say “Take, eat” (Matt. 26:26). Jesus turns those two verbs from precursors of death into a foretaste of eternal life, because He who is God chose to humble Himself unto death to save us (Phil. 2:6-8). Thus, the words that brought sin into the world now become the ones that offer salvation.

II. Not His Brother’s Keeper

Adam and Eve need look no further than the lives of their children to see the tragic seeds of their rebellion take root. But God promises them a Deliverer. Perhaps in those words Eve speaks after the birth of her first son, “I have gotten a man from the Lord” (Gen. 4:1), she expresses the longing that this would be the Promised One. Little could Eve know when she first held him in her arms that he would one day murder his brother and flee into exile, thus depriving his parents in a moment of not one but two sons.

In this story of envy and fratricide, Bible students often focus on the contrasting ways in which the two brothers worshiped God. Usually
The Fallen *(Gen. 3:7-24)*

In the fulfillment of the serpent’s promise, the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened, but their dream of enlightenment turned into a nightmare. This, the first of countless subsequent satanic schemes, demonstrates that the devil’s promises of precious gold are delivered only in the form of tinsel. Deprived of the glory of holiness, burdened by the sense of guilt, their physical nakedness revealed in a consciousness of inner nakedness, the first pair sought to hide from God and to fashion their own covering.

**In your own experience, or what you have seen happen to others, what other “wonderful promises” have turned into hellish nightmares?**  
**What principles can we learn from these sad accounts?** *See also Judges 17:6, Prov. 14:12, Mark 4:19, 1 Tim. 6:10.*

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Look at the immediate results of the Fall. First, alienation arose between Adam and Eve *(Gen. 3:7)*; then between them and God *(vs. 8)*; nature itself suddenly turned more hostile *(vss. 16-18)*; the relationship between Adam and Eve changed even more so *(vs. 16)*; there was the reality of death *(vs. 19)*; there was a change in how humanity related to toil *(vs. 19)*; and Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden *(vss. 23, 24)*. If only they could have seen in advance the consequences of their actions!

What’s fascinating, too, is that the serpent told Eve that they would be like gods, knowing good and evil. He was right *(see vs. 22)*. It obviously wasn’t in God’s will for humans to know evil; He wanted to keep them innocent and dependent upon Him, like children *(see Deut. 1:39)*. God had given them only good *(tov)*; everything that He created was only “good” *(tov)*. The Creation in Genesis 1, which was “good” with no evil, taken together with Genesis 3:22, reaffirms the idea that God wanted only good, not evil, for humanity.

**How can you preserve or (if need be) regain some innocence?**  
**What things are you doing that are, perhaps, making that goal more difficult? What changes do you need to make?**
we regard Abel as someone who put his dependence on God and Cain on self. But the difference between them involves even more.

The Hebrew word for the offering of each brother is closely associated with the grain offering of Leviticus 2 and designates them as “gifts.” They apparently both brought them to express gratitude to God. But Cain had no real gratitude in his heart. Genesis 4:4, 5 declares that “the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (NRSV). The offering reflects the giver. Thus, the real problem is not with Cain’s offering but with Cain. Abel’s purity and godliness rebuke Cain’s selfishness, so Cain murders him. The taking of life is a prerogative that belongs only to God. Following the footsteps of his parents, Cain wants to be like God. He covets God’s power, not his holiness. Such would-be

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Genesis 3:1, 4:16-22, Romans 16:17-20, 2 Timothy 2:15, 1 Peter 5:8

1. If Adam and Eve were perfect beings, where did the weakness that Satan exploited come from? Is God in some way at fault? Why, or why not?

2. One of the things we can learn from Genesis is how seriously we are to take the reality of Satan. It is quite popular among people who regard themselves as sophisticated or enlightened to ignore or downplay this literal reality. Why is it dangerous to assume that Satan is merely a symbol of evil? Conversely, is there danger in attributing too much influence to Satan to escape responsibility for our shortcomings?

3. Satan mixed truth and error in his efforts to persuade Eve to follow his direction. Can you think of any examples of this today? How can we ourselves avoid being deceived?

4. Satan promised Eve that she would know good and evil and that she would thus be godlike. Did God intend us to know evil? What do you think this meant to Adam and Eve, given that evil was an unfamiliar concept to them? Why did they find it attractive? Can you think of examples today of evil that is presented as harmless and desirable or as a form of liberation?

5. Cain, the first murderer, was also the progenitor of the first city builders, craftsmen, warriors, and (one could argue) civilization itself. Does this mean that human civilization is evil, or even a necessary evil? How does this relate to the suspicion—among Adventists and others—of cities as being particularly sinful?
Hope for the Fallen

After the Lord came down to the Garden and all the participants were together, He issued His judgments upon them all.

**Read** Genesis 3:14-19. What was pronounced upon them? What were the immediate, as well as the long-term, consequences?

Even before Adam and Eve heard about toil, pain, submission, thorns, and the judgment upon them for their transgression, God granted them words of hope and promise. Verse 15 not only offers the first glimpse of the gospel but also presents a compressed history of the conflicts between the family of the serpent and the descendants of the woman. The genealogies of Genesis develop the lines of those who chose “sonship,” either with the devil or with God. And the rest of Scripture continues to depict the struggles between God’s people and their enemies. The conflict announced in verse 15 points past the immediate actors in the drama and toward the entire conflict between good and evil as it was to be played out on the earth, a conflict that we ourselves are part of right now.

**Compare** Genesis 3:15 with Revelation 12:17 (see also Rev. 12:9, 20:2). What common elements are found in both texts? How do these verses show how the principles of the conflict first expressed in Eden will be manifested at the end of time?

Despite the blatant transgression on the part of Adam and Eve, and despite their sorry attempts to justify their actions, the Lord offered them hope that although there would be enmity between them and the serpent, the serpent’s head would be crushed; that is, it would be destroyed. Here we see the first promise of the gospel, of what Jesus would do for fallen humanity.

**Keeping in mind today’s lesson, read Hebrews 2:14.** What hope does this text offer to you amid the struggles you face in your part in the great controversy between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

gods are self-centered. Unlike the true God, they do not care for others. This is Cain’s fundamental problem.

We observe his self-centeredness and arrogance in the answer he gives when God asks him, “‘Where is your brother Abel?’” (vs. 9, NRSV). Cain replies, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (vs. 9, NRSV). The first murderer is indeed not his brother’s keeper, though he should have been. God created human beings to care for one another just as He cares for all created beings. But sin always drives wedges between people. Those wedges or barriers can be jealousy, hate, blame, or an infinite list of other problems.

It would take God coming in the flesh, our Elder Brother, to show humanity what it meant to be a true Keeper and also to right the wrongs of the first Adam. Whereas Cain took his brother’s life, Jesus

Witnessing

Fooled and manipulated by a thing of great beauty! Betrayed by something that was not what it seemed to be. Lulled into doing something utterly destructive as a result of letting the defenses down—just once! Discovering that the promise made was not the promise kept. Losing everything in an instant, all because doubt crept in where it had no place to be.

Sounds like breaking news you’d hear on TV about the latest political scam or insider trading scandal, right? Actually, this story first made headlines in Eden around six thousand years ago. Ever since the sordid details of Adam and Eve’s fall were first written down, its aspects have repeated themselves with heart-sickening regularity in the lives of earth’s inhabitants.

We can’t be too diligent, therefore, in guarding against the powers of Satan, the archenemy of Jesus Christ. Satan is creative beyond imagination, and his ability to present degenerate, immoral, and perverted activities as attractive and winsome is par excellence. He does not hesitate to use an array of the most alluring temptations to lead someone to spiritual destruction.

Satan works overtime to build new, and yet unknown, attractions designed solely to override the salvation-focused efforts of God’s servants. He knows that he is going to burn in hell, and he intends to take with him as many people as possible.

So, can anything be done about him? By the grace of God, yes! Satan is vulnerable when he comes face to face with a Spirit-filled Christian. He is unable to withstand the onslaught of the powerful plan of salvation. He falls before the presence of Christ Jesus and His true followers. Each Sabbath school member is a warrior for Christ. Each member witnesses by accepting the responsibility to lead nonbelievers away from the devil’s traps and toward the promise of eternal life.

The devil’s still going to burn; but by God’s grace, when he does, he’s just going to be a lot lonelier than he imagined.
After the Fall *(Genesis 4)*

Genesis 4 very quickly gets into the story of Cain and Abel. Though many years passed since the Fall, the Bible quickly gets into some of its catastrophic results. The enmity predicted in Genesis 3:15 and hinted at in Cain’s jealousy was manifested in full force in the murder of Abel. This murder demonstrated that Cain was a follower of Satan *(see John 8:44)*.

**Why** did God accept Abel’s sacrifice but reject his brother’s offerings?
*Gen. 4:3-7. (Compare with Lev. 17:11, Heb. 9:22. See also Heb. 11:4.)*

Notice in Genesis 4:6 and 7 how God dealt with Cain. God tells Cain to do well, to obey, and thus he shall “be accepted.” He says this, though, in the context of sacrifice, which is needed because no matter how well we do, it’s still not good enough to save us. We see here, then, a balance between the law and grace and faith and works. Cain, apparently, understood neither, as reflected in the sacrifice he offered, as well as in his refusal to “do well” *(see 1 John 3:12)*.

**How** does Romans 5:17–6:6 reflect the balance between faith and works as in the story of Cain and Abel?

Cain discovered that people cannot hide anything from God *(Gen. 4:9, 10)* and that the divine Sovereign will right all wrongs. As punishment for his callous sin, the earth, which had been forced to drink innocent blood, would withhold its strength from the murderer *(vss. 11, 12)*.

Meanwhile, verses 17 through 24 disclose a picture of rapid moral decline, as well as technical and cultural advances. Polygamy and murder characterize the family of Cain. Yet, the Bible writer does not attribute only evil to the descendants of Cain; their achievements are recognized. He notes that artisans, craftsmen, pastoralists, and agriculturalists descended from Cain.

The chapter concludes with a reference to Seth, who replaced Abel. Seth became the ancestor of the line of pre-Flood patriarchs who bridged the period between Adam and Noah.

*Have you ever been envious? Isn’t it a wretched feeling? In what ways did that envy have the potential to turn into something even worse? Why is falling before the Cross your only hope in getting victory over this emotional scourge?*
gave up His so that we might partake of life eternal through Him. Whereas the first Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, Jesus, the Second Adam, resisted temptation in order to hold out to a starving world the bread of righteousness and the fruit of the Spirit. Of these provisions He bids us, “Take, eat,” and through the psalmist declares, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When children are learning, they ask all kinds of “Why?” questions. Often they ask just to hear you respond. In Genesis 3:1, the “cunning” (NKJV), “crafty” (NIV), “subtle” (KJV) serpent asks, “‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden”?’” It has been said that “there are no right answers to wrong questions.” What was wrong with the serpent’s question? What was he trying to insinuate to Eve? How can we avoid asking the wrong questions about God and what He offers us?

Thought Questions:

1. “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). Such a small sentence containing a devastating lie. It makes no logical sense that Eve, Adam, or humanity would listen to Satan’s accusations against God. (Read Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 52–62.) Discuss what humanity has lost as a consequence of believing this lie. How do insights from the Bible and Patriarchs and Prophets on the origins of the evil and chaos of our world help protect us against its ultimate consequences? Whom do you know who would benefit from having you share these discoveries?

2. From a beautiful, sinless paradise to the first murder, a brother killing his brother, seems such a huge failure. How did things go so wrong so fast? What does this tell you about sin? Share a personal testimony of God’s involvement in your life when He turned failure into victory. What practical steps do you take each day that help to keep you from failing again?

Application Question:

As you review the story of humanity’s separation from God, where do you find hope? Reread Genesis 3 and 4 as a Sabbath school class. Make a list of each text that contains hope. Discuss how those texts reflect the whole theme of Scripture, humankind’s debacle, and God’s infinite salvation. What makes this hope tangible, even as we wait for our Savior to return? Covenant as a class to spend time in the Scriptures each week looking for other pictures of hope. How will you make your discoveries fruitful in blessing some other person?
**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 52–62, 71–81; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 3 and 4.

“Satan represented to the holy pair that they would be gainers by breaking the law of God. Do we not today hear similar reasoning? Many talk of the narrowness of those who obey God’s commandments, while they themselves claim to have broader ideas and to enjoy greater liberty. What is this but an echo of the voice from Eden, ‘In the day ye eat thereof’—transgress the divine requirement—‘ye shall be as gods’?”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 55.

“The ‘seed’ is put in the singular, indicating, not that a multitude of descendants of the woman jointly shall be engaged in crushing the serpent’s head, but rather that a single individual will accomplish this. These observations clearly show that in this pronouncement is compressed the record of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, a battle that began in heaven (Rev. 12:7-9), was continued on earth, where Christ again defeated him (Heb. 2:14), and will terminate finally with Satan’s destruction at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:10). Christ did not emerge from this battle unscathed. The nail marks in His hands and feet and the scar in His side will be eternal reminders of the fierce strife in which the serpent bruised the woman’s seed (John 20:25; Zech. 13:6; EW 53).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 233.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. A lot of unanswered questions remain regarding the Genesis account of the Fall. When you meet God face to face, what are some of the questions you might ask regarding this account? Meanwhile, why is it so important to trust God now despite having many unanswered questions? *See also 1 Cor. 4:5, 13:12.*

2. Discuss reasons we as Adventists believe that Satan is a real being of incredible deceptive power. Why is it important for us to hold to this belief?

3. Sing together, as a class, a hymn or song that acknowledges the victory and promises we have in Jesus.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 5:32–9:29.

Memory Text: “The bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth” (Genesis 9:16).

“Have you heard the latest about Noah, that religious fanatic?”
“Noah, pious Noah?”
“Well, pious Noah’s piety has made him mad. Says water is going to drop out of the sky.”
“Water from the sky?”
“Says it’s going to create a flood and kill all life on earth, except those who go into the ark.”
“The ark?”
“It’s a thing that floats on water, like a boat. Says only those who get into it will survive the rain. He’s building it now. Says water is going to be God’s judgment upon us for all our sins. Please, we’re not all that bad, are we?”
“Water from the sky . . . ? Why would a decent guy like him make up something so crazy?”
“Because he is crazy. And such a legalist. Doesn’t he know how we’re saved by faith alone? And standards, standards, standards—he’s always griping about standards.”
“Noah’s a bit intense, but he’s basically an honest, upright guy.”
“Fine, but why should we believe in something that has never happened before? The scientists say it isn’t feasible; the philosophers say it violates natural law. Water rises from the earth each morning as a mist; it doesn’t drop out of the sky, right?”
“Right . . . I guess.”

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 4.
“For All Flesh Is Come Before Me”

Adam and Eve had children after Cain and Abel, including Seth (Gen. 5:4), whose line of descent outlines the history of the pre-Flood patriarchs loyal to God. Noah was of this branch (vss. 28, 29).

Read Genesis 6:1-13. What kind of picture does it present about the state of unregenerate humanity? In what ways might we see not only our age but even ourselves in here?

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Though some commentators suggest that the designation “sons of God” (Gen. 6:2) refers to heavenly beings, context and content indicate a reference to the descendants of Seth. The “daughters of men” (the “men” who multiplied in verse 1) would then designate the posterity of Cain. The “sons of God,” representing the line of faith, contracted marriages with unbelievers and succumbed to the danger of such alliances.

In these verses, the wickedness of humankind could not be stated more emphatically. Notice the words every, only, and continually (vs. 5). The Hebrew word translated “imagination” is derived from the verb earlier rendered by “to form” (Gen. 2:7) and here indicates “deliberation” and “action.” In the Old Testament the word heart describes the complete inner life of a human being, as it is the seat of emotion, will, and understanding. The words corrupt and violence in verses 11 through 13 expand the picture of verse 5.

How do Genesis 6:6, 7 depict God’s sorrow for what was taking place?

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After describing the human heart, the author turns to the grief and the affliction of the heart of God. Moses describes the Lord in terms that human readers can understand. God is not some far-off abstract idea or unbending principle; like us, He is portrayed as characterized by will, open to the tragedy of sin and prayer and weeping over human guilt. These words give us a feeling for how difficult it is to explain or even understand the introduction and great increase of sin.

Compare Genesis 6:6 with Matthew 23:37. What do both tell us about how “emotionally” tied the Lord is with this world? What other verses show this tie (for instance, John 3:16)? How does this help you better understand God’s ties to you individually?
Key Text: Genesis 6:5-8

Teachers Aims:
1. To describe the condition of the world prior to the Flood.
2. To discuss Noah’s faithful obedience and what it means that he found favor with God.
3. To expound on the destruction of the entire world by water.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Impending Destruction (Gen. 6:7)
   A. Because of humanity’s great wickedness on the earth, the Lord decides to destroy it with a flood of waters.
   B. The Lord asks Noah, a descendant of Seth, to build an ark.
   C. Noah shows true faith in action by obeying God’s command.

II. Into the Ark of Safety (Gen. 7:2-23)
   A. God instructs Noah to bring two of every unclean animal and seven of every clean animal into the ark, male and female.
   B. Noah and his family are the only human beings that enter the ark.
   C. The Deluge destroys the whole earth and reverts it back to a watery waste, much like the dark waters on the first day of Creation.

III. A New Covenant (Gen. 8:20-22, 9:12-15)
   A. After the Flood, Noah builds an altar and makes an offering to the Lord.
   B. God promises never again to destroy every living thing by water and gives a rainbow as a sign of His covenant.

Summary: Because of the great wickedness of humankind, God destroys the earth with a flood. Only Noah and his family and the animals taken aboard the ark survive. After the Flood, God promises not to destroy the earth with water again.

Commentary

God’s refashioning of the world after the Flood parallels the sequence of events during Creation week. Interesting coincidence, surely, but what is the deeper significance underlying this? In an effort to appreciate the spiritual values contained in these parallels, let us first look at Noah’s world to learn why it was destroyed, why God refashioned it, and what this teaches us about His mercy.

I. Righteous Noah
   Noah lived in a world that had so rejected God that Heaven gave it the death sentence. Humanity’s every thought and action focused on evil (Gen. 6:5). Violence had reached a point that God could not let it continue. The creation that He had pronounced “very good” (Gen. 1:31) had become “corrupt” (Gen. 6:11). Twice the Lord
Noah and the Gospel of Grace  
*(Gen. 6:8-22)*

**Read** Genesis 6:8. Notice: Noah finds “grace” in the eyes of the Lord (the first time the word grace appears in the Bible). Grace is God’s unmerited favor poured out upon unworthy sinners *(Rom. 4:14-16; Eph. 2:5, 8; 2 Tim. 1:9)*.

**Read** what Scripture says about the character and life of Noah. *Gen. 6:9, 22; Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:5*. Why, considering the kind of person Noah was, did he need God’s grace? *See also Gen. 9:20, 21; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8*.

Noah, a sinner like the rest of us, nevertheless revealed a life of faith and obedience. This is best seen in the fact that he obeyed the command of the Lord to build the ark.

**Read** Genesis 6:22 and 7:5. What do these verses tell us about how true, saving faith—the kind of faith that not only builds the ark but gets into it, as well—is manifested in the life of a believer?

In the midst of a violent, corrupt world, the Lord has this man, Noah, whose faith was most clearly made manifest by his works. This is a crucial point that all people who love the Lord and the great promises of salvation through grace alone, by faith in Jesus, must remember. Noah could have had all the faith possible, but had he not acted on that faith and obeyed the Lord’s commands, he and his family would have been swept away with the rest of the world in the Flood *(see Heb. 11:7)*. That should be a great object lesson for all of us who, day by day, claim the righteousness of Jesus for us as the only hope of our salvation: A faith that isn’t manifested in obedience isn’t really faith at all.

**Look at your life during the past week:** How has your faith been manifested in your works? What works revealed a decisive lack of faith on your part? What changes do you need to make?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

declares that He was sorry that He had made humanity (vss. 6, 7). Some English translations say that He “repented” or “was sorry” that He had brought the human race into being.

But “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). The Old Testament uses the word righteous to describe a person who avoids sin and does good to his or her neighbors. Blameless implies “wholeness” or “completeness,” and the Septuagint (the first Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses here the same Greek word that it applies to sacrificial animals. Only the blameless may dwell on God’s holy hill (Ps. 15:1, 2), and blamelessness is the prerequisite for intimate fellowship with God.

Noah also walked with God, a characteristic he shared with Enoch (Gen. 5:23, 24). The Bible frequently uses the imagery of “walking” to describe a whole way of life. The patriarch lived in obedience and in relationship with God.

God tells Noah that He plans to destroy His creation with a global flood (Gen. 6:17), but will rescue Noah and his family. Noah must construct an ark (vss. 14-16) and, along with his family, enter it with representative examples of the various kinds of living things (vss. 18-20). The Lord promises to establish His covenant with Noah (vs. 18).

The apostle Peter called Noah “a herald of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5, NRSV). Jewish tradition in such works as the Sibylline Oracles and Jubilees portrays Noah as preaching a call for repentance. As the years dragged by and those who responded to his preaching died or drifted back into the world’s corruption, Noah must have become discouraged. Only his trust in God enabled him to endure the constant scoffing until the day came when God directed him and his family to board the ark (Gen. 7:1).

II. The Unmaking of the Earth

The description of the events of the Flood follow in reverse order those of Creation week. In Genesis 1 God created the world out of chaos and declared it good; in Genesis 7 He de-created it, because it had become evil. Genesis 1:6-8 tells how God separated the waters above from the waters below. Genesis 7:11 mingle them again. Dry land emerges in Genesis 1:9, 10 and vanishes in Genesis 7:19, 20. The living things He created in Genesis 1:20-26 He blotted out in Genesis 7:21-23. The good creation that had become corrupt was no more. Only Noah and his family survived (Gen. 7:23). The Bible says it this way: Then God “remembered” Noah (Gen. 8:1). When God “remembers” in Scripture, He intervenes in human lives and history. He rescues Lot from Sodom (Gen. 19:29), gives Rachel children (Gen. 30:22), and delivers Israel from Egyptian slavery (Exod. 2:24; 6:5, 6).

The Lord now begins to re-create the earth, following the same sequence as in Genesis 1. A wind blows (Gen. 8:1; cf. Gen. 1:2), the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven close (Gen. 8:2; cf. Gen. 1:6), the waters recede (Gen. 8:3; cf. Gen. 1:9, 10), and the dove
Tuesday

October 31

The Flood (Gen. 7:1-16)

**What** does the reference to “clean” and “unclean” animals imply about the knowledge Noah already possessed on this matter? *Gen. 7:2, 3, 8; 8:20.*

The fact that God distinguished “clean” and “unclean” animals long before the difference was explicitly stated in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 presupposes the clear knowledge of the distinction between “clean” and “unclean” animals from earliest times, certainly long before the Jewish nation was established.

**Read** Genesis 7:7-24. What evidence can you find in these texts that shows that the whole world rather than just a small, local section was destroyed by the Flood? *Compare Gen. 7:19 with Dan. 7:27, Job 28:24.*

The Deluge covered the earth, and the world returned to the conditions that existed before God had prepared a habitable globe (*Gen. 1:2*), with the exception of Noah and those with him in the ark. The repeated biblical statements, “the waters prevailed . . . increased greatly upon the earth . . . prevailed exceedingly . . . fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered . . .” (*Gen. 7:18-20*), indicate a worldwide catastrophe. The words regarding the extent of those killed, contrasted with only Noah and those in the ark remaining alive, also testifies to the worldwide extent of the Flood. The universality of the Flood is further attested to by the worldwide distribution of Flood legends and the global distribution of fossil remains. In short, the texts are very clear that the Flood was worldwide, as opposed to some mere local event. This point is important because many Christians, influenced by some scientists who claim that there was no worldwide Flood, make the Flood only a local event, despite the clear testimony of the Scriptures to the contrary.

Have you ever had an animal that you had to put to sleep? How does that analogy help us understand what was happening here and how God must have felt about this act of destroying so much of the “good” world He had created? What “good” in your own life must you jealously guard lest it turns into “only evil continually” (*Gen. 6:5*) and becomes something that must be destroyed?
returns with an olive leaf (Gen. 8:11; cf. Gen. 1:11, 12). Finally God permits the saved animals and human beings to leave the ark and to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 8:15-19; cf. Gen. 1:21-28).

As Noah witnesses the mountaintops emerge from the receding waters, surely this draws his mind back to the account of that other time when water covered the whole earth. Such comparisons were not mere coincidence. In refashioning the earth, God deliberately mirrored the sequence of events during Creation week as a means of drawing Noah’s attention, and ours, back to our origins and the apex of Creation, the creation of man and woman, who enjoyed face-to-face communion with God. By bringing what is lost to mind in this

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Genesis 9:8-17; Exodus 20:24; Hebrews 11:7; 13:8; 2 Peter 2:4, 5, 9

1. The background of the Genesis flood story shows us a God who experiences sorrow and grief. How are we to view such statements as Genesis 6:5-7, in which we are told that God is sorry for creating the human race? How do we reconcile this view of God with the more congenial view (to some) of God as unchanging?

2. It is common to view grace as a concept that appears primarily in the New Testament and rarely—if ever—in the Old Testament. Yet, Genesis 6:8 states that God’s grace preserved Noah’s life from destruction by the Flood. Does this mean that the same kind of grace active in the New Testament can be found in the Old Testament after all? How is this grace similar or identical? How, if at all, is it different? Consider also those who refused or did not receive grace.

3. The Genesis flood is clearly a worldwide event, corroborated by scientific evidence and by similarities found in ancient flood myths. What would be the implications of accepting current theories that suggest that the Flood was a local event? How would it affect the message that the Bible seems to be giving us?

4. Why, if God felt that Creation was such a failure, did He choose to save any of it at all? Was He uncertain about His decision? What do we make of the fact that life on planet Earth seems not to have improved significantly?

5. Noah’s first act on leaving the ark was to offer a sacrifice and to worship God. God’s response was to make a covenant with Noah. What does this say about the role of prayer and worship in our relationship with God?
The Lost Generation

If you read the Genesis account of Noah and the Flood by itself, you’ll notice that nowhere does it teach that anyone else was even offered an opportunity to get into the ark. It sounds as if it were to be built only for Noah, his family, and the animals (Gen. 6:13-22). Other verses, New Testament verses, vaguely hint at something else (Heb. 11:7, 1 Pet. 3:20, 2 Pet. 2:5). Ellen White, of course, is very clear that Noah’s work on the boat was to be a witness to the world of what was coming and that Noah “entreated them to seek a refuge while it might be found.”—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 97. Considering all that we know about the Lord and His desire for the salvation of all humanity (1 Tim. 2:3, 4), it’s not surprising that God was offering people a chance to be saved.

It says a lot, however, about the degenerate character of that generation that only Noah’s family, and the animals, got on the boat. After all, it would have taken humility and the willingness to face the scorn of the majority to have sided with Noah. It would have meant being unpopular. It would have meant having faith in something that you didn’t fully understand. It would have meant admitting you’re in a situation in which you can’t save yourself but must depend upon God. These are hardly the attributes one would expect to find in such an evil generation.

**Compare** what it meant for those in Noah’s generation to have sided with Noah and what it means to make a stand for Christ and all His commandments today. What parallels exist?

The good news in all this is that God is always offering people a way out, always offering people a chance to get on the ark. The same Jesus we see weeping over Jerusalem is the same Jesus who surely was pleading through Noah for people to repent; it’s, of course, the same Jesus who is pleading with us today, as well, who is calling us to get into the ark before people are swept away and taken away in the final judgment (see Matt. 24:38-41).

What factors work against you staying faithful to Jesus? What have you found is the best defense against the forces that would turn you away from Him and the truth for this time? What practical things can you do to avoid or at least alleviate, as much as possible, these factors?
way, God declares His longing to restore this communion to us. The land itself that emerges from the watery grave points to God’s power to restore the soul from sin. The old nature must be buried as was the old world by water, a symbol of the baptism that Christ would one day offer to the whole earth, even as the Flood covered the whole earth. Rising out of the watery grave into the newness of life, the earth points Noah to God’s power to regenerate the soul.

God took a risk when He created our world, and what humanity did with it disappointed Him. But He does not give up. He creates again. And Scripture declares that He will re-create one final time. God’s people await “the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire. But, in accordance with His promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home” (2 Pet. 3:12, 13, NRSV). Revelation 21:1 foretells a new heaven and earth replacing the old ones. Ultimately, the Flood tells us that God never gives up on His creation.

Witnessing

Peer pressure can be a positive, and sometimes negative, force in our lives. For instance, if we learn at work that a co-worker never misses attending church on Sunday, we may push a bit harder to get out of bed on time and make certain we are at Sabbath School on time. On the other hand, if others notice that we faithfully observe the Sabbath hours from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, they may ask why we do this, and a line for dialogue is opened.

In our lesson this week, we learned that peer pressure was a decisive factor in keeping people from truly listening to Noah’s predictions regarding a catastrophic, global flood. With their very lives hanging in the balance, these same people were unwilling to face rejection or retaliation by their peers, even if by doing so they may have saved their own life and the lives of others close to them. Sadly, they were not strong enough of character to take the big step and challenge the status quo.

In no way is this type of behavior limited to Noah’s time! How many times have we observed children, teenagers, and adults giving in to a crowd mentality because they were unable (or maybe unwilling!) to choose correctly for themselves. Choices made under those types of circumstances are generally disastrous for all involved.

As followers of Christ, each of us must lead by example. Our conviction to the truth must be unwavering to those around us. No matter how adverse the circumstances, others must always see God’s reflection in us.

Peer pressure can work for the good of others. Let’s boldly exert our influence so that we bear constant witness of Christ’s presence in our hearts and lives.
Covenant and Renewal

**How** did Noah express his dedication, homage, and gratitude to God upon leaving the ark? *Gen. 8:20.*

“Here was a lesson for all succeeding generations. Noah had come forth upon a desolate earth, but before preparing a house for himself he built an altar to God. His stock of cattle was small, and had been preserved at great expense; yet he cheerfully gave a part to the Lord as an acknowledgment that all was His. In like manner it should be our first care to render our freewill offerings to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 106.

**How** did God respond to Noah’s devotion and worship? Write out the response, paraphrasing it in your own words. What is God saying here? *Vss. 21, 22.*

The divine response is stated in human terms. God had destroyed the world because “every imagination” of the thoughts of the human heart was evil (*Gen. 6:5*); that same idea, about humanity’s evil, is restated here, even after the Flood. The Lord is expressing the sad fact that even despite the Flood, humanity wasn’t in and of itself going to change for the good. What’s fascinating is that from the way the text is written, it appears that God’s resolve not to destroy the earth again comes in response to the sacrifice offered by Noah. This blood sacrifice is linked with the promise; it’s not the goodness of humanity, obviously, but what’s in the sacrifice that leads to the new promise. God’s going to spare them a flood despite themselves. In some ways this reflects the same principles found in the gospel: God saves not because of ourselves but only because of mercy and grace toward us.

Read *Genesis 9:8-19.* What’s promised here? Who is included in this covenant? What can we learn from this about the *new covenant* promise of salvation we have in Jesus? What are the similarities, what are the differences? *Compare Gen. 9:12 with 17:7, Ps. 105:10, Heb. 13:20.*
Icebreaker: Think back to the time when you gave your first public speech. Remember how your presentation was received. Did the children—if it was show-and-tell time in grade school—enjoy what you brought? If it was a persuasive speech in English class, were your classmates convinced? Why did so few of the earth’s inhabitants respond to Noah’s appeals? How did Noah’s close relationship to those who did respond, his family, impact their acceptance of his warning? What does this tell us about discipling people toward Jesus?

Thought Questions:
1. You have heard the comment “Drastic times call for drastic measures.” After Adam and Eve’s choice to eat from the forbidden tree, humankind quickly lost sight of God. “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5, NIV). Discuss what your ideas are on what caused this rapid decline. In light of the biblical evidence and the ideas raised during your discussion, why did God have to take drastic measures to halt humankind’s fall away from Him? How will you explain the reasons for the Flood to a friend?

2. “Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark” (Gen. 7:15, NIV). Why didn’t this miraculous occurrence sway public opinion in favor of entering the ark? What issues and ideologies in the society of that day prevented a whole generation of people from hearing God’s warning? If you were filming a news report of this event, what kind of narrative would you give? Today there are individuals who God’s Spirit is striving to call to Him. How do we find them and share our testimony of God’s goodness in a saving way?

Application Question:
Taking turns in class, describe a time in which your mobility was limited. For example, was it after an injury, or were you on a long airplane flight? How did you feel when you were freed? As you consider what it was like for the inhabitants of the ark, share what they may have thought when they saw that first rainbow. Why did God choose such a dynamic and vibrant representation of His covenant with humanity? Bring paper and crayons to class and invite the class members to draw a rainbow (yes, the adults!). Then have them give it to one of the children at your church with a note of encouragement.

“Many at first appeared to receive the warning; yet they did not turn to God with true repentance. They were unwilling to renounce their sins. During the time that elapsed before the coming of the Flood, their faith was tested, and they failed to endure the trial. Overcome by the prevailing unbelief, they finally joined their former associates in rejecting the solemn message. Some were deeply convicted, and would have heeded the words of warning; but there were so many to jest and ridicule, that they partook of the same spirit, resisted the invitations of mercy, and were soon among the boldest and most defiant scoffers; for none are so reckless and go to such lengths in sin as do those who have once had light, but have resisted the convicting Spirit of God.

“The men of that generation were not all, in the fullest acceptance of the term, idolaters. Many professed to be worshipers of God. They claimed that their idols were representations of the Deity, and that through them the people could obtain a clearer conception of the divine Being. This class were foremost in rejecting the preaching of Noah. As they endeavored to represent God by material objects, their minds were blinded to His majesty and power; they ceased to realize the holiness of His character, or the sacred, unchanging nature of His requirements. As sin became general, it appeared less and less sinful, and they finally declared that the divine law was no longer in force; that it was contrary to the character of God to punish transgression; and they denied that His judgments were to be visited upon the earth. Had the men of that generation obeyed the divine law, they would have recognized the voice of God in the warning of His servant; but their minds had become so blinded by rejection of light that they really believed Noah’s message to be a delusion.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 95, 96.

**Discussion Question:**

Have people in the class place themselves in the mind of someone who lived in Noah’s time and have them give all the reasons they shouldn’t believe in the Flood. What lessons can we learn from their thinking, not only for ourselves and our own faith but about how we can understand the thinking of others who don’t take our warnings about the end of time seriously?
The Earth After *the* Flood

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Genesis 9–11.*

**Memory Text:** “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

Years ago a British philosopher and strong supporter of evolution, Bertrand Russell, joked about the climactic conclusion of the evolutionary process: “If I were granted omnipotence, and millions of years to experiment in, I should not think Man much to boast of as the final result of my efforts.”—Dan Falk, quoted in *Universe on a T-Shirt* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 203.

Putting aside the philosopher’s error regarding origins, one could understand the cynicism regarding humanity. This point becomes especially apparent regarding the Flood and afterward. You’d think that after a flood, which wiped out the entire earth, people would have gotten the message regarding God’s attitude about sin and rebellion; apparently they didn’t. The stories that the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write don’t paint a pretty picture; humanity, obviously, didn’t learn much. Things started to degenerate quickly, even immediately.

This week we’ll take a look at the early days after the Flood, at the changes that came and at the results. Yet, even amid all this carnage and rebellion, we can see the working of a God who loved the fallen race and worked to save it from itself despite itself, much as He still is doing today.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 11.*
Noah and the New Earth

No doubt Noah and his kin stepped off the ark into a new world, one in some ways radically different from what they had known before. It’s hard to imagine what must have gone on in their minds. In one sense, they must have been terrified, seeing the landscape a wreckage. We today, thousands of years later, though we see evidence of the Flood, are used to it: It’s all we have ever known. Plus, who knows in what way nature has been able to adjust and heal after the initial devastation. For Noah and those with him, though, it must have been a heart-wrenching, even fearful experience.

Read Genesis 9:1-3. What hope and encouragement did Noah and his family receive from the Lord, especially considering their circumstances?

Compare the above verses with the words of the Lord to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28-30. What differences are there between the two accounts, and what do you think were the reasons for the differences? What great change took place over their relationship to animal life?

The most radical change, of course, came with the introduction of meat eating, something that was not allowed before. Many of the beasts that before were their companions now were to become their meals. Something wonderful, something harmonious, was lost to sin. Isn’t that always the case?

Human beings, according to the Bible texts, were not originally carnivores; neither were the animals. In the original earthly paradise, despite the great distinction between human beings and the animals (Gen. 1:26, 27), they also were linked in many ways: All were created by God, all had life, and they were to share a similar diet. Perhaps this was all part of God’s way of showing humans that despite their superior status, they needed to respect those creatures over whom they had “dominion.”

What’s some of the wreckage you see in your own life because of sin? What steps can you take toward healing and restoration?
In the previous commentary we noted the parallels between the sequence of events of Creation week and those of the two stages of the Flood. We saw how Genesis portrays the receding of the Flood as a re-creation of the world. Similarly, the covenant that God makes with Noah after the Flood also points back to certain features of Creation week. As we shall see, these parallel features testify to God’s eternal faithfulness and to the immutability of His covenant promises. God seals His covenant to Noah with a rainbow, a symbol
Blood and Life

“But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen. 9:4-6).

**What** do you believe these verses here are saying to us, today, as Christians?

With these verses, we see again the results of sin, of God acknowledging the reality of what life will be like for human beings in a fallen world. It’s very interesting, too, that the command against eating blood is something that clearly predates anything Jewish, anything linked with the Levitical laws of cleanliness and uncleanliness. Centuries later, in the book of Acts (15:20, 29), the Gentile converts were admonished to, among other things, abstain from blood, more than likely a clear reference to what was happening here in Genesis (see also Lev. 17:11, 1 Pet. 1:19).

**What** reason does God give for the strict prohibition regarding the taking of another human life?

There’s been much debate over the centuries regarding the meaning of these texts and especially their application. In every case of someone killing another person, should that person be killed, regardless of the circumstances? Many Old Testament laws were put in place to deal with special circumstances (see, for instance, Num. 35:11). Then, of course, we have numerous Bible texts about forgiveness, turning the cheek, and not judging; then, too, there are the accounts in the Old Testament of the Israelites, at God’s command, wiping out entire cities. Regardless of how one puts all these together and formulates a theology regarding justice and punishment, one point is not debatable: Human life is precious and must be regarded as such. The Lord will surely have His day of reckoning for those who disregard the sacredness of human life (2 Cor. 5:10).
of His promise not to destroy the earth again by water. Later, we see God keep that promise, despite the rebellion at the Tower of Babel.

I. The Rainbow Covenant

In Genesis 1 God ended His creation with the Sabbath rest. Later, after the Flood in Genesis 9, He makes a covenant between Himself and all living creatures (Gen. 9:8-17). The rainbow will be its symbol. (Interestingly, the Old Testament uses only three symbols to represent a covenant: the Sabbath [Exod. 31:16], the rainbow [Gen. 9:13], and circumcision [Gen. 17:11]. While God establishes the circumcision covenant specifically with Abraham’s descendants, the rainbow covenant is with “all flesh” on the earth [Gen. 9:17].) The fact that the re-creation of the world after the Flood concludes with a covenant applying to the whole world further confirms that its parallel at the end of Creation week (the Sabbath) also is meant for the entire earth. The rainbow, the sign of that covenant, becomes a promise of God’s mercy to all future generations of a fallen race. “In heaven the semblance of a rainbow encircles the throne and overarches the head of Christ. . . . When man by his great wickedness invites the divine judgments, the Savior, interceding with the Father in his behalf, points to the bow in the clouds, to the rainbow around the throne and above His own head, as a token of the mercy of God toward the repentant sinner.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 107.

The rainbow covenant not only points back to Creation week; it directs our attention forward to God’s call of Abraham and the covenant that God makes with him. It ties the first eleven chapters of Genesis (often called the Primeval History) with the rest of the book. In both covenants God “establishes” them (Gen. 9:9, 11, 17; compare 17:7, 19, 21). The two covenants are eternal (Gen. 9:16; compare 17:13, 19) and, as we have already seen, both have a sign (Gen. 9:12, 13, 17; compare 17:11). Also, the Lord wants those with whom He made it to “remember” (Gen. 9:15, 16) and to “keep” the covenant (Gen. 17:9, 10). (Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:12, both used to refer to the Sabbath commandment, show that Scripture regards “keep” and “remember” as equivalent terms when employed in a covenant context.)

II. The Tower of Babel

While God is faithful, humanity breaks faith with God, sometimes with dire consequences as the Flood narrative and the rebellion at the Tower of Babel both show.

God had told Adam and Eve that He wanted them to fill the earth with human beings (Gen. 1:28), and He repeated the injunction with Noah and his family after the Flood, requesting them to disperse and populate the entire world (Gen. 9:1). But Noah’s descendants refused to do so. In defiance of the divine command, they decided to build a
After the Deluge (Gen. 9:18-29)

No matter the Lord’s gracious offers of peace, safety, and prosperity or His warnings of judgment, destruction, and death, folk just don’t seem to get it, do they? Of course, we don’t need Bible stories to prove that point; after all, we have our own selves—and what more proof do we need?

Read over Genesis 9. After the Flood God establishes a covenant with every living creature, promising never to destroy the world again with a flood, even using the beauty of a rainbow as a token of His promise. What story does God then immediately contrast with this, His promise of this “everlasting covenant”? What messages are in there for us? Also, what does it tell us that righteous Noah (Gen. 7:1) should be so heavily involved in this sordid tale?

Noah’s words about his children were not forever sealing the fate of posterity; rather, the incident seemed to reveal character traits already there and how these traits, as they often are, would be passed down from one generation to another. “The sin of Ham was not an unintentional transgression. He may have seen his father’s shameful condition accidentally, but instead of being filled with sorrow over his father’s folly, he rejoiced in what he saw and found delight in publishing it. . . . Ham’s two older brothers did not share his perverted feelings. Adam also had had two well-disciplined sons, Abel and Seth, and one child of sin, Cain. Although all had received the same parental love and training, sin manifested itself much more markedly in one than in the others. Now the same spirit of depravity breaks forth in one of Noah’s children, while the older sons, reared in the same home and under the same conditions as Ham, show an admirable spirit of decency and self-control. As the evil trends of criminal Cain were perpetuated in his descendants, Ham’s degraded nature revealed itself further in his offspring.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 266.

Very often we are so concerned about our sins being forgiven, which, of course, is important (Rom. 4:7, Eph. 1:7, Col 2:3, 1 John 1:9, 2:12). Yet, when you read the story of Noah doing something so bad here, what should that tell us about the importance of how our actions, especially the actions of those who have great responsibility, can be fraught with negative consequences? What can you learn from this about how our actions influence others toward either the good or the bad? Think about some next big decision you have to make. What will be its influence on others?
city and then a tower where they could remain together. Beyond that they declared that they wanted to “make a name” for themselves. Up to this point in the book of Genesis the pattern has always been that of a superior giving a name to someone: God to His creation (Gen. 1:5, 8, 10); Adam to the animals (Gen. 2:20); a husband to his wife and parents to children (Gen. 4:25, 26; 5:3). But the people of Shinar shatter

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Genesis 9:3; Leviticus 24:17; Daniel 12:4; 2 Peter 2:4, 5, 9; Revelation 22:14, 15

1. After the Flood, God permits meat eating for the first time. Some have said that He does this because of the devastation of plant life at the time. Others have said that the introduction of flesh eating is intended to shorten the individual life span and limit the damage any one person could do in a single life. How do you view these explanations? What is the evidence for either of them?

2. Genesis 9:4-6 seems to suggest that God instituted, among other things, capital punishment, at least for murder. Do you think this is the case? If not, how would you explain the language that seems to indicate that God actively requires the life of the evildoer? Do you agree that the purpose of this passage is to describe, not prescribe, the present state of affairs? Explain.

3. After the Flood, Noah’s sons, and arguably Noah himself, exhibited many of the same traits that led to the Flood in the first place. Do you think God expected the Flood to cure or curb humanity’s tendency toward sin? If not, what do you think God intended by permitting these tendencies to manifest themselves again?

4. Second Peter 3:5, 6 predicts that people at the end of time will claim that the events in Genesis did not take place as written but that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (vs. 4). It is interesting to note that the people mentioned here do not disbelieve in the fact of divine creation as such. They merely disbelieve the literal details. Can we see parallels in current efforts to harmonize the biblical account of Creation with long ages of time, divinely guided evolution, and so forth?

5. The Tower of Babel story indicates that the people of the time had once again acquired a great deal of technical skill and were using it toward questionable ends. In this current age we are seeing, once again, great technological advancement and great anxiety concerning its possible uses. Are Christians today correct in feeling ambivalent toward such things as stem-cell research, genetic engineering, and so on? Explain.
Scoffers—Past and Present

In 2 Peter 2, the apostle writes against false teachers who were once faithful to the Lord and who then turned away. With that background in mind, read 2 Peter 3:1-11 and then answer these questions:

1. To what source and authority does Peter immediately point the false teachers and scoffers? Why is that answer so important?

2. What’s the real motive behind the scoffing? In what ways do we see the same principles manifested today?

3. What point is Peter making by reference to the Flood story here? See 2 Peter 2:5.

What is fascinating among Peter’s words is his statement that the scoffers will say that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet. 3:4). These verses point to a dramatic fulfillment of prophecy that has been especially revealed in the past century and a half. Science has proposed a geological interpretation that favors long ages, rather than a sudden catastrophe like the Flood, to account for the surface condition of the earth. In other words, things just keep on as they have before; many of the massive canyons and rock formations didn’t come, we are told, by some sudden catastrophe but simply were the result of things continuing as they were from the beginning of creation; they’re there only from a long uniform progression of events.

This idea also is the basis of evolution, a steady process of things slowly evolving as they did from the beginning of time, rather than a sudden literal six-day creation of life on the earth, as the Bible teaches. It is remarkable that long ago Peter pointed to these two areas as being the points of contention in the last days. That this has happened as predicted is a strong sign that we are living in a time when we are going to have to make a firm choice on whose side we are going to stand.

Read over again the texts for today in Peter. Might you see yourself in there—some doubts, some questioning, some scoffing? What must be done in order to get you back on the narrow path? Matt. 7:14.
the pattern by seeking to establish a name on their own initiative.

In rebellion against God’s purpose for humanity, they construct the city and the tower from fired brick, mortared together with bitumen, or asphalt. The plains of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers lack sources of building stone. It probably had to be imported at considerable expense from the distant mountains. Most construction employed mud or clay brick. But the terse literary style of the Bible, probably mentions the use of brick and asphalt mortar for another reason. The people of Shinar are building in opposition to God with flimsy materials. They could not raise the tower very high before the bricks would begin crumbling under their own weight. Even then God blocked their plan by transforming their single human language into several. The people who wanted to make a name for themselves did exactly that. Their city acquired the name Babel, which biblical tradition translates as confusion (Gen. 11:9).

Even after God saved a tiny remnant of humanity and made a covenant not to destroy the earth again by water, humanity rebelled against Heaven at the Tower of Babel. But amid all the confusion,

**Witnessing**

Following the Flood, God presented Noah and his family with a new start. They had the opportunity many of us only can dream about—the opportunity to begin fresh, to start over, and to try things a second time. For a time, God’s influence permeated all of life. In time, however, life reverted back to pre-Flood days.

How awful, we say. What wasted opportunities, we say. We never would have allowed that to happen had we been there, we say. Wait. Can we be so sure? To see how we might have behaved, let’s consider how we’re behaving now in our homes, communities, and schools.

Do we

—love one another equally, disregarding cultural, racial, and social differences?
—pursue only Christlike friendships, pushing aside those who would lead us into temptation?
—follow Christ’s example rather than looking for ways to circumvent His influence in our lives?
—place others’ needs before our own?
—witness to others at every opportunity?
—intentionally/unintentionally pass on to our children love for sinful pursuits?

Are we able to state confidently that our time here on earth is used wisely in preparing others around us for the soon return of Jesus Christ? If not, now is a very good time to review the fate of those in Noah’s day who spent their time in worldly pursuits. We do not want to miss the boat the second time around!
The Tower of Babel

Chapter 10 of Genesis then recounts, in a very general sense, the repopulation of the earth after the Flood. People are born, nations are formed, and the masses start spreading out into powers that will, in some cases, appear later in the Bible.

Read Genesis 11:1-10. What example do you see of scientific advancement and what the people intended to do with this knowledge?

Considering their recent history, why might they have wanted a tower that went into heaven?

What reason does the Lord give for wanting to stop them? See also Gen. 3:22, 6:5.

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

Perhaps the most fascinating verse in the story of Babel is verse 6. The Lord sees that, working together, these people are going to acquire a great amount of knowledge and technical skill. One would think that would be good; after all, look at how much good technology has done for us today. And yet, the Lord here clearly sees this as something bad and moves to stop it by confounding their language, hence spreading them out and making it much more difficult for them to pool their resources and fulfill their schemes. Why would He do that?

What lesson is here for us? What kind of knowledge are we seeking? What are we doing with that knowledge? What important lessons could this story have for us on a personal level? See also 2 Tim. 3:7.
God keeps His promises, reminding us that He alone is faithful; when we deserve death, God intercedes with mercy. “Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deut. 7:9).

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Share your knowledge of gardening. What kind of plants do you prefer? How do you ensure a more abundant yield? After the Flood, God restated His original intention that His followers fill and inhabit the earth: “‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth’” (Gen 9:1b, NIV; also see Gen. 1:28). What directions did God give to make this possible? Read Genesis 9:1-7. How did God’s instructions after the Flood differ from those He gave to Adam and Eve? In what ways were they similar? What does this tell you about the consequences of sin?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Look up the word *covenant* in at least six passages of Scripture. Compare your findings with other class members. What does it mean for God to make a covenant with humankind? See Genesis 9:12-17. If you were doing an objective “risk-benefit analysis,” what risks did God take, and what benefits did humankind reap? Consider your personal journey with God. What have you done to affirm your relationship with Him?

2. When you read about Noah’s sons (see Gen. 9:18-27), what do you learn about sin and righteousness? Why is Noah’s prophecy about his sons so stark in regard to Ham’s descendants and so encouraging about Shem and Japheth’s? Covenant with God to invite Him to help you as you make daily choices on how to spend your time and talents.

**Application Question:**

As you read the story of the Tower of Babel recorded in Genesis 11, consider the time line that led up to this rebellion. Make a list of the characters who were on God’s side and a list of those who denied God’s involvement in their lives. Discuss why there were so many scoffers, even so close to the time of Creation. In 2 Peter 3:3, 4, we read about scoffers at the end of time, our generation. How will you pursue an aggressive strategy to build a positive connection to God? In what ways will you reorder your daily agenda/schedule in order that time spent with Him is a priority? Plan to share your new schedule with at least one close friend. Encourage each other to spend meaningful time with God.
**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “After the Flood,” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 105–110.

“The prophecy of Noah was no arbitrary denunciation of wrath or declaration of favor. It did not fix the character and destiny of his sons. But it showed what would be the result of the course of life they had severally chosen and the character they had developed. It was an expression of God’s purpose toward them and their posterity in view of their own character and conduct. As a rule, children inherit the dispositions and tendencies of their parents, and imitate their example; so that the sins of the parents are practiced by the children from generation to generation. Thus the vileness and irreverence of Ham were reproduced in his posterity, bringing a curse upon them for many generations. ‘One sinner destroyeth much good.’ Ecclesiastes 9:18.”


“Geologists claim to find evidence from the earth itself that it is very much older than the Mosaic record teaches. . . .

“But apart from Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Those who reason so confidently upon its discoveries have no adequate conception of the size of men, animals, and trees before the Flood, or of the great changes which then took place. Relics found in the earth do give evidence of conditions differing in many respects from the present, but the time when these conditions existed can be learned only from the Inspired Record. In the history of the Flood, inspiration has explained that which geology alone could never fathom.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 112.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **What are some ways in which science tends to be another attempt at creating a modern Tower of Babel? Why, like the one in antiquity, is it also doomed to failure?**

2. **As a class, go over the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. Share your answers with each other.**

3. **We, of course, can do nothing about our genes or our genetic traits of character. What can we do, though, to try and lessen, as much as possible, the negative impact of those traits of character? What role does the gospel have in this important work? How does the idea of the new birth fit in with this important concept of character formation?**
We ended last week on a sour note: the Tower of Babel and all that it represented about fallen humanity’s seeming inability to learn from the past.

This week we begin on a more hopeful one: the descendants of Shem, the family line from which sprung the patriarch Abram, who, according to Paul, is “the father of us all” (Rom. 4:16). That is, he is the father of all who believe in Christ, through whom the promises made to Abraham are realized; for through Christ we are now Abraham’s seed, “and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29); the promise of a heavenly Canaan where no more evil, sin, and death exist, much less rule.

In other words, after the Fall, the Flood, Noah’s drunkenness, and the Tower of Babel fiasco, the Lord now introduces, in the clearest manner yet, hope for the human race. And it begins with Abram, who—although living amid a family and a culture steeped in idolatry—was a follower of the true God and who, for his faithfulness, was given promises not only for himself and for his family but for the whole human race.

This week we begin looking at the life of Abram, his initial calling, his response, his humanity, and, most important of all, his relationship to God—the great exemplar of what it means for a fallen human being to live by faith, to be justified by faith, and to reveal that faith through works.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 18.
Abram’s Background

Read Genesis 11:10-32. (See also Joshua 24:2 and Acts 7:2.) What story immediately precedes these texts? Why might these accounts have been placed next to each other? What details are found here regarding the background and family of Abram?

Even though chronological considerations suggest that Abram was the youngest of Terah’s sons, he appears to be mentioned first in Genesis 11:26, 27 because of his importance as the ancestor of the chosen family. Although archaeology has revealed much concerning the times in which Abram lived, the great empires of the day form merely part of the background. The spotlight is on certain patriarchs and their families who attempted to keep alive the truth and knowledge about God. This is the great focus of Genesis: The stories, however sordid at times, center on those whom God entrusted with preserving the knowledge of Him in a world filled with idolatry, paganism, and all forms of superstition.

In how many stages did the call of Abram take place, according to Acts 7:2-4? Compare Gen. 12:1 with Acts 7:4. Why do you think he went through these stages rather than going immediately to Canaan?

Stephen states that God first appeared to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees and called him to go to the land He would show him. But he didn’t go right away. Instead, there was the stopping point in Haran, where he lived until his father, Terah, died. It was after his father’s death that he finally left for the Promised Land.

Abram’s family was involved in false worship and idolatry; yet, for quite a while he remained with them. What might we learn from this story about how we should relate to members of our own family who are not walking with the Lord?
Key Text: *Genesis 12:1-7*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To explain the Lord’s call to Abram and his willingness to obey.
2. To expound on the weaknesses of humanity, in spite of the promises of God.
3. To show that Abram was faithful even in the absence of any physical evidence of God’s promise.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. The Lord Calls Abram (Gen. 12:1)
   A. After Babel, the people were divided into nations and began to disperse on the earth.
   B. Abram lived in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans.
   C. Abram, obeying the word of the Lord, leaves his homeland and takes his family to Canaan.

II. The Promises of God Amid Human Frailty (Gen. 12:10-13)
   A. The Lord promises to make Abram’s descendants a great nation.
   B. When faced with a famine, Abram journeys to Egypt.
   C. Overcome by fear for his life, Abram hides the truth that Sarai is his wife.

III. Driven by Faith (Gen. 13:8-18)
   A. Because of the greatness of their possessions, Abram and Lot must move in different directions.
   B. Abram displays unselfishness and nobility of character in allowing Lot to choose his land first.
   C. Abram trusts and believes in God’s promise to make his descendants as numberless as the dust of the earth, even though he does not yet have an heir.

**Summary:** God calls Abram to leave his homeland and go to a land that He promises to give to Abram and his descendants. Abram obeys the Lord and remains faithful, even in the absence of an heir.

**COMMENTARY**

What does it take to leave behind all you know and strike out into the unknown? People often move to a new home when they marry or relocate to a new city, or even abroad for a new job. Yet, how many would leave the comforts of everything familiar just on the promise alone of a better future, without the immediate fulfillment of that promise? That’s exactly what Abram does. We’ll look at three facets of Abram’s world—the customs, the politics, and warfare—to enrich our understanding of how radical his decision was.
The Call


Notice a great irony here: Among the things that God says He will do for Abram when he leaves is to “make thy name great” (*Gen.* 12:2). Compare this with the Tower of Babel story, in which one of the reasons they worked on the tower was in order to “make us a name” (*Gen.* 11:4). From a human perspective, it seems more likely that those who would create their monumental human achievement would have a better chance of having “a name” than someone who—leaving behind family, race, culture, and fertile land—would travel to a place “not knowing whither he went” (*Heb.* 11:8).

Yet, today no one knows the name of any one of those who worked on the tower; in contrast, almost all the world knows the name of Abram.

What powerful lesson should there be in this contrast for us, who in our own way might seek to “make us a name”?

Besides the call, again, to go to Canaan (*compare Acts* 7:2 to *Gen.* 12:1), Abram was given this amazing promise that God would make of him a great nation. This obviously implied children, something else that he would have to take on faith, considering that up to this point his wife had been childless (*Gen.* 11:30). Despite all this, verse 4 seems to imply no hesitation on his part. God called him to go, God made promises to him, and Abram went ahead (*see Rom.* 4:13) by faith.

Abram, sure that God had called him, moved out by faith on what—from a human perspective—seemed very foolish. What does this say to us about having to move and live by faith, even to the point of “foolishness” (*1 Cor.* 1:25, 2:14)? At the same time, how must we be careful not to step out by “faith” under the assumption that God is leading when He might not be? How can we know the difference?
I. “Leave All Your Human Security Behind!”

Life in the ancient world was precarious. Infant mortality was extremely high. Disease and accident could strike at any time, and the limited medical knowledge and resources were almost defenseless against disease and injury. Most communities survived on locally grown food and were only one harvest away from starvation. Drought, hail, and other extreme weather; insect invasion; plant and animal diseases; and warfare could wipe out crops, herds, and workers instantly. If anything happened to them, it almost would be impossible to import food from areas that might have surpluses, as modern countries do today.

The only way that people could survive was by being part of large extended families. The children could work the fields in a time without the large-scale machinery on modern farms and provide the labor for crafts and other production. Also, children were the only guarantee that the family line, tribe, or nation would not die out. The larger and wealthier the family, the more resources it had to cope with emergencies. Marriage ties with other extended families would provide additional resources. In a time without any kind of pensions or social services, families took care of the elderly and disabled. It was impossible for a single person or even a couple to survive alone.

Abram belonged to a well-to-do family. He knew that he could depend on his extended family in Ur and later in Haran to care for him in old age.

Then God called him to abandon all that meant security and to emigrate to a land in which he would be an alien without ties to any social and economic support system. Although he took many servants and other retainers with him, they left behind their land, the only source of wealth and capital in the ancient world. But God said, Take a journey of faith with Me, and I will make a great nation of you.

II. ”Brother” and “Sister”

In order to be a great nation, Abram needed an heir, and Sarai was barren. God tested Abram’s faithfulness and character in this way, revealing to him those areas of weakness and deceitfulness in his character that needed rooting out.

Deceit and trickery seem to be a powerful trait in Abraham’s lineage, as the biblical record shows when he seeks to protect himself from Pharaoh. It will resurface several times in his life, including a parallel situation with Abimelech, a local ruler in Gerar (Genesis 20). His son Isaac will follow his father’s pattern with another ruler with the same name (Genesis 26). And, of course, deceit and trickery will blossom most fully in the life of Abram’s grandson, Jacob.

In the conflict between Abram and Pharaoh over Sarai, Abram is worried that the Egyptian ruler may kill him to gain Sarai. Pharaoh does not want her just to add to his harem. From Pharaoh’s perspec-
The Faith of Abram

Read all of Genesis 12. Write out what message it has for you about faith, about trials, about character, whatever impresses you. What can you take away from this story that could help you in your daily walk with the Lord?

We might expect that, because he was following the call of God, Abram would have had his paths smoothed by Providence. The Bible gives no evidence that as long as we remain faithful to Him, no trials will come. On the contrary.

Indeed, not long after he had entered Canaan, a severe famine caused him to depart for Egypt, which was watered by the flooding waters of the Nile. The Sacred Record teaches us that even those who follow God’s commands may have to endure trials of faith. Think about what a great strain that famine could have put on his faith: called to go into this land, and look what happens! A famine? This famine, which drove him out of Canaan, could help explain his lack of faith regarding Sarai and Pharaoh. Hunger and fear reduced the hero of faith to a person with frailties that most of us can identify with readily. Faith succumbed to fear and fear to deviousness as Abram used one half truth to conceal the other half.

“The Lord in His providence had brought this trial upon Abraham to teach him lessons of submission, patience, and faith—lessons that were to be placed on record for the benefit of all who should afterward be called to endure affliction. God leads His children by a way that they know not, but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 129.

When was the last time you failed a test of faith? What lesson did you learn from that failure that can help you next time not to fail?
Inductive Bible Study


1. The biblical account of Abram, later Abraham, does not furnish a great deal of detail about his family, his status, and so forth, although later Jewish, Christian, and Muslim commentators were happy to fill in the gaps. What do we know about Abram and his background that might help us to understand why God chose him and his family?

2. Shortly after Abram left his homeland for a place about which he knew nothing, he encountered frustrating and disturbing trials and difficulties. Do you think he ever doubted his mission or that he had heard what he thought he had heard? Does the Bible give us any evidence?

3. What message about Abram’s—and by extension our own—character do we see in the fact that he could show the most abject cowardice in his dealings with the Pharaoh in Egypt yet the purest unselfishness in his dealings with Lot? How can God help us so that our best moments outnumber our worst moments?

4. Melchizedek, to whom Abram gave his tithe of the spoils of war against invaders, is a mysterious figure. He has not been mentioned before, and he is not mentioned again in Genesis. Yet, somehow Abram knew and recognized him as a spiritual authority. Was Melchizedek Christ himself, as some commentators claim? Why, or why not?

5. Abraham is most often cited as an exemplar of faith. Was it easier for him to have faith than for us because of his extremely intimate, face-to-face relationship with God? How has God provided for us to have a deep and abiding communion with Him?
Abram and Lot

Read Genesis 13:1-13. What does this tell us about the character of Abram? How does this help us understand the kind of man he was and why he was an example of what it means to live by faith? What Bible texts can you find that admonish us to show the same kind of spirit? *See, for instance, Phil. 2:4.*

Returning from Egypt, Abram called on the Lord at the second altar he had built in Canaan *(Gen. 13:3, 4).* Fortified by this renewal of his relationship with God, he was able to face another test. Once more the promise of land seemed to elude Abram *(vss. 5, 6)*, and a decision had to be made.

Abram’s failure in Egypt seems counterbalanced by the nobility of character that he demonstrated in his dealings with Lot. From the heights of Bethel Lot saw the Jordan Valley, well watered and fertile like the Garden of Eden and the plains of Mesopotamia. Lot chose that which appealed to his sense of immediate gain. Little did Lot realize what his choice would cost him. The decision was between “faith” and “sight,” and the results demonstrate the wisdom of making the right choice. Abram’s close relationship with the Lord and his determination to walk by faith enabled him to look beyond the immediate temporal advantages to eternal gain.

Read Genesis 13:14-18. What promise does the Lord give to Abram? Why do you think the Lord waited until this time before giving it *(see vs. 14)* to Abram? Again, why did it require a lot of faith on Abram’s part to believe in these promises?

Think of the last time you saw someone reveal the kind of graciousness and selflessness displayed here by Abram. What do you think is the secret of having such a character, especially for beings who are, at their core, selfish sinners? What needs to happen in your own life in order for you to develop more of this kind of character? Imagine, too, what your local church would be like were everyone to display such an attitude.
covenant promise. This offers us assurance of God’s faithfulness.

III. Raiders From the North

God’s promise to make Abram a great nation often overshadows other aspects of Abram’s character: his role as mediator and his role of warrior, as is seen in the story in which Lot is taken captive during the raid on Sodom and Gomorrah.

The confederation of armies that attacks Sodom, Gomorrah, and others cities around the Dead Sea seems to have been more on a campaign of plunder rather than conquest. They were raiders seeking booty rather than actually trying to control the region. The forces captured some of the people either to hold for ransom or to use as slaves, among them Abram’s nephew. Warfare was the main source of slaves in the ancient world.

Some older scholars once scoffed at the idea that Abram would attempt to rescue Lot and his family with just 318 fighting men. Yet, it was actually a good-sized force for the period. Ancient records indicate

Witnessing

This week’s lesson points out two important acts of faith that we, as Christians, must be prepared to do for ourselves and for others.

First, we must be prepared to witness, regularly and faithfully, to those who know us most intimately, whether they share our faith and beliefs or not. That’s not always an easy thing to do. Often we face ridicule, snubbing, or out-and-out hostility when we witness.

However, we have studied in our lesson this week that it is not only possible but required of us to witness and remain faithful to God, even when those around us ridicule or resist to our faith sharing. While we would like to see those closest to us (family, friends, co-workers, and others) turn their lives over to the care and love of our heavenly Father, we may not always have the opportunity to do so. It is, however, required of us to faithfully model our behavior after our heavenly Father’s—He will take care of the rest.

Next, we learn that we must always answer God’s call, no matter how unknown the journey seems to us. This travel through the unknown may manifest itself in unlimited ways: perhaps coming face to face with a major health crisis—one with life and death consequences. Or losing a beloved spouse or child. Perhaps it’s the loss of a needed job or divorce after many years of marriage. Whatever the issue, facing a wrenching situation does not mean the outcome is unknown. God knows the outcome; He is in control; He will guide us through our trials. He asks us to remember that “if God leads us to it, He will lead us through it”—as the saying goes. This is the comfort we can hold close to our hearts, the comfort we will share with others who are faced with an unknown journey. Wherever He leads, we will follow.
Melchizedek and Abram

Genesis 14:1-16 recounts the story of the plunder of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abram’s liberation of the people, including Lot, from the invaders. Thus, though a man of faith and a worshiper of the true God, Abram could also be a man of war.

What light does the Melchizedek episode cast upon the spiritual stature of Abram? How again do we see his faith revealed in his works? Vss. 17-24.

Melchizedek (meaning “my king is righteous”) was king of Salem (a name for Jerusalem; see Ps. 76:2) and priest of the Most High God. Abram worshiped the same God. In deference to Melchizedek, who welcomed and blessed the patriarch upon his return from the battle, Abram gave the king-priest a tithe of all (vs. 20), indicating that the institution of tithing was practiced long before Moses and the Jews.

After this great victory the Lord appears to Abram and gives him a wonderful promise. “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1). Ellen White indicated that Abram needed that encouragement, considering the ire his recent victories aroused in some of his neighbors.

Read Abram’s response (vss. 2, 3). What’s so human, so understandable, about why he would say what he did? Why, from all rational and logical standpoints, did this request make so much sense?

God (vss. 4-6) then repeated His earlier promise that Abram’s descendants would be innumerable in multitude (Gen. 12:2, 13:16). Even though the advancing age of Abram and Sarai seemed to make the promise of descendants increasingly more impossible, Abram took God at His word and trusted the divine power. This is seen in Genesis 15:6, which Paul later quoted (Rom. 4:3).

Abram believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. How does it help us understand what it means to be accepted by God? What things in the story so far about Abram give you hope; what things show you the need to make some changes in your life?
that armies usually consisted of only a few hundred or, at most, a few thousand men. The fact that Abram could muster so many indicates that he was more a tribal chieftain than just head of a little family.

Abram’s rescue of Lot from captivity reflects Christ’s ransoming of us from the bondage of sin. Abram not only reflects God’s saving work toward us but mirrors the walk of faith that all must have who are called by God to be in the world and not of it, knowing their home is in a better place.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Take a moment to think about your family history. Share what you remember about your ancestry and your country of origin. God gives us a glimpse into Abram’s heritage in Genesis 11:27-32. Why are there no hints of Abram’s future significance in this account? What changed his life and caused him to have such impact in his world and on us? Read Genesis 12:1-9, substituting your own name for Abram’s. How is God asking you to bless your world, either where you live or in a distant land?

**Thought Questions:**

1. “‘You will be a blessing’” (Gen 12:2b, NIV). The span of time from Abram’s call to service in the first part of Genesis 12 to his recorded failure in verses 11-19 seems rather short. Discuss this part of Abram’s life. What lessons can we learn from his story that might prevent us from making similar mistakes? Ask God to strengthen your faith so that you will remain steadfast, no matter what circumstances you face.

2. Which of your relatives spends the most time interacting with you? How does your relationship result in personal growth for both of you? If it doesn’t, what issues cause challenges? As you read Genesis 13 and 14, what can you learn from the interaction between Abram and Lot that might help you reach an unbelieving relative for Jesus? Ask God to guide you this week in taking the first step in drawing this person to Jesus.

**Application Question:**

As you read the story of God’s encounter with Abram recorded in Genesis 15:1-21, what do you learn? What rituals do we perform in Christianity that are designed to impress us with the concrete reality of God’s desire to bless and to change our lives? Consider the ordinances of baptism and of Communion. This week, choose a clear night and a quiet place to “‘look up at the heavens and count the stars’ ” (Gen. 15:5, NIV). Ask God to impress your heart with new assurances of His covenant of salvation with you.

After God promised Abram again that his seed would become a great nation, Abram sought a sign, an affirmation of the promise *(Gen. 15:7, 8).* “The Lord condescended to enter into a covenant with His servant, employing such forms as were customary among men for the ratification of a solemn engagement. By divine direction, Abraham sacrificed a heifer, a she-goat, and a ram, each three years old, dividing the bodies and laying the pieces a little distance apart. To these he added a turtledove and a young pigeon, which, however, were not divided. This being done, he reverently passed between the parts of the sacrifice, making a solemn vow to God of perpetual obedience. Watchful and steadfast, he remained beside the carcasses till the going down of the sun, to guard them from being defiled or devoured by birds of prey. About sunset he sank into a deep sleep; and, ‘lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him.’ And the voice of God was heard, bidding him not to expect immediate possession of the Promised Land, and pointing forward to the sufferings of his posterity before their establishment in Canaan. The plan of redemption was here opened to him, in the death of Christ, the great sacrifice, and His coming in glory. Abraham saw also the earth restored to its Eden beauty, to be given him for an everlasting possession, as the final and complete fulfillment of the promise.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 137.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, discuss your answers to the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. How do we today, New Testament Christians, understand what it means to be accounted righteous before God?

2. Do you know someone right now who believes that he or she is being called to go, like Abram, not knowing “whither he went”? What could you as a class do to help this person through whatever struggles his or her journey is presenting?
Lesson 8  *November 18-24

Faith and Frailty

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study:  Gen. 16:1–19:38.

Memory Text: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son” (Genesis 18:14).

This week we still follow Abram and Sarai (soon to be Abraham and Sarah) as they proceed, not only on their geographical journey but on their spiritual one, as well. As they continue, we see their faith and their frailties contrasted against a world that, for the most part, had lost the knowledge of God and was steeped in sin and spiritual ignorance, a condition best exemplified in the seething cauldrons of Sodom and Gomorrah.

A famous French writer once wrote, “Your principal maladies are pride, which cuts you off from God, and sensuality, which binds you to the earth.”

How little changes; fortunately, God’s grace doesn’t either, for He loves even the proud and the sensual. This point will come through most poignantly as we, in following the story of the patriarch, encounter the sad and sordid tale of Sodom and Gomorrah, where—despite God’s love and willingness to forgive—pride and sensuality bring these folk to the point of no return.

As Scripture says, God is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Pet. 3:9); some, nevertheless, will. How unfortunate, when—because of the Cross and what Christ has done there—none need to. This week we’ll get a sad example of some who do.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 25.
Hagar and Ishmael *(Genesis 16)*

Read again the promises that God had so far made to Abram regarding the nation and seed that would spring from him *(Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 13:15, 16; 15:4-6, 13)*. Notice something interesting. Abram is told, again and again, that he will father a great nation; that out of “‘your own body’” *(Gen. 15:4, NIV)* his heir will come. Something, though, is conspicuously absent from each of those promises: none mention Sarai, his wife. The promise is that Abram will father the nation; it says nothing about who the mother would be. Sarai was his wife, and so the natural and logical assumption would be that she’d bear the seed; yet all the promises—as they appear so far in the Scriptures—say nothing about whom the mother of that great nation would be.

**Read** *Genesis 16.* Considering how the promises were made to Abram, why is it easy to see how they could have resorted to the course they did? Why, though, was that course still wrong?

Ten years had passed since Abram had entered Canaan, and still there was no sign of the promised seed. In typical human frustration, the patriarch listened to “reason”; how else, after all, could he have a child? Certainly not from old and barren Sarai. Again, considering that nothing specifically said that Sarai would be the mother, it’s not hard to understand the logic behind their actions. Although a man having more than one wife was compatible with the practices of the time, the commonality of the practice didn’t make it right, and both Abram and his wife—as followers of the true God—should have known better. How often even we, as followers of the true God, do the wrong thing because everyone else is doing it, even though we know better.

When you read through *Genesis 16*, you can see an important principle unfold: that violation of God’s law will bear bitter fruit. What lessons can we learn from this story when we find ourselves tempted to violate what we know is right in order to achieve something that might even, in and of itself, be good (after all, Abram and Sarai were only trying to fulfill a promise God had made)?
In the previous lesson we studied how Abram defeats the kings of Elam, Shinar, and Ellasar in battle and rescues his nephew Lot, whom they had taken captive. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah also owe their freedom to Abram. Their deliverance at Abram’s hand uniquely positions them to witness God’s mercy and saving grace, an event that could have worked repentance and saved their cities from future destruction. Tragically, this does not happen. Underlying the tragedy, however, is a story of intercession and deliverance, one that shows God’s longsuffering love toward sinners and His mediation on
The Covenant Reiterated *(Genesis 17)*

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God appeared to Abram and repeated in expanded form the covenant He had first made with the patriarch.

**Compare** the earlier promises that God made to Abram *(Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 13:15, 16; 15:4-6, 13)* with what God says to Abram here in Genesis 17:1-16. What points are added, or elaborated on, that didn’t appear before?

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God tells Abram (soon to be Abraham, which means “father of many”) to be “perfect” before Him, a reminder that God’s mercy and grace don’t cancel the call to faithful obedience *(Rom. 5:20–6:2)*. He then unfolds to him even more details of the same promise first made to him almost twenty-five years before, which included the need to circumcise all the infant males.

A great deal of speculation has occurred over the long centuries about why this specific rite would be the sign of the covenant. Considering, however, the promise made to Abram repeatedly about his “seed” *(Gen. 12:7; 13:15, 16; 15:3, 18; 17:7-10)*, circumcision apparently was to symbolize the national and generational relationship that the Lord wanted to have with His special covenant people, a relationship to be maintained by faith *(Rom. 4:11, 12)*. It was through this nation, this people, over many generations, that the truth about God was to be spread to a world and through whom the Messiah would come. No doubt, too, it also symbolized the circumcision of the heart *(Deut. 30:6, Rom. 2:29)*. With the advent of Jesus and the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles, it was no longer required *(Gal. 5:6)*.

Also, if it wasn’t clear before, it was now—Sarai (Sarah), old Sarah, would give birth to the promised seed *(Gen. 17:15-19)*. If Abraham needed faith before, he surely needed it at this time.

**Compare Genesis 17:15-19, and Abraham’s reaction to the promise of the seed through his wife, with Romans 4:16-25. What can we learn from these texts (as well as Gen. 15:2, 16:4) about what righteousness by faith means? What hope can you draw from these texts about the faithfulness of God even when our own faith isn’t always as unflinching as it should be?**
our behalf. And it all begins with an act of hospitality so wonderful that God saw fit to record it for posterity.

I. Hosting the Lord of the Universe

When the Lord and His angels come to Abraham’s encampment, the patriarch demonstrates classical biblical hospitality. He invites his visitors to stop for a meal and to refresh themselves. Washing a guest’s feet was also a standard practice. Abraham modestly offers them “a little bread” (Gen. 18:5, NRSV), but his culture expected that a host would be generous in what he served, which he was. Abraham personally brought the food instead of having a servant do it (vs. 8). Abraham honors God, and in turn, God does three remarkable things: He acknowledges Abraham’s hospitality with a promise that Sarah will bear a son within a year (vs. 10). He also praises Abraham’s righteousness and then takes Abraham into his confidence concerning the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

II. A Tale of Two Cities

When God tells Abraham what He is going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah, the patriarch pleads for Him to spare the cities of the plain if they have at least a minimum number of righteous people living in them. In typical Near Eastern fashion, Abraham bargains with God, bringing that number successively from 50 to 10. The Lord takes Abraham’s intercession seriously. Although the doomed cities do not have the agreed upon minimum number of righteous—a fact that the Lord already knows—God respects Abraham’s intervention for Sodom and Gomorrah. “Love for perishing souls inspired Abraham’s prayer. . . . His deep interest for Sodom shows the anxiety that we should feel for the impenitent. . . .

“The spirit of Abraham was the spirit of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 140. Though Abraham’s intercession is not enough to spare Sodom, God provides a way of escape for Lot and his family.

III. Lot’s Example

Lot had wanted to go to the city so much that he turned his back on God’s promise of Canaan to his uncle Abraham. Never in the biblical descriptions of the boundaries of the Promised Land do we find the region of Sodom included.

“Though Lot had become a dweller in Sodom, he did not partake in the iniquity of its inhabitants.”—p. 139. However, once he began dwelling there, the city had a powerful influence on him and his family. When the angels came to warn them of Sodom’s impending doom, he “lingered” (Gen. 19:16, NRSV). The divine messengers literally had to lead him, his wife, and his two daughters away by the hand. The biblical account regards such forceful action as “the Lord being merciful to him.” Once the angels got the reluctant family outside the
The Lord on Earth \textit{(Genesis 18)}

In Genesis 18, the promise of a child is again made, this time specifically to Sarah (vs. 10) — a promise that seemed impossible to fulfill (vs. 11). Yet, we are shown the answer, “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (vs. 14), an answer that should stand even today as a stern rebuke against all unbelief and doubt, especially among professed worshipers of the Lord.

Read carefully verses 16-21. What is being contrasted here? How do we see here, in a small way, what is really the basic division of all humanity? See also Matt. 25:32, 33; Rom. 11:26; 2 Pet. 2:6; Rev. 22:14, 15.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of this well-known story centers on just who was speaking to Abraham. The word translated “Lord” in some of the verses (Gen. 18:1, 13, 17, 22, 26) is the famous four-letter word often translated as “Jehovah” (YHVH), the sacred name for God the Father — the word used, for instance, in Genesis 4:1, 4; 6:5; Exodus 20:11; 1 Kings 9:1; Psalm 32:2, and, literally, thousands of other texts in direct reference to God.

Thus, we have here, many centuries before the incarnation of Jesus, the appearance of the Lord, on earth, in what is clearly a human form (see Gen. 18:1-8). We see, therefore, even way back here the incredibly close connection God, the Creator God, has with us, His fallen earthly creation. Considering the size of the universe, the vastness and complexity of all creation, at least the part that we can see, we are given here another example of the amazing love that God has for us, that He would manifest Himself here in human form and talk to Abraham, a sinful human being. This is, of course, only a precursor of what would happen centuries later in the life and ministry of Jesus, who not only became human but died for the sins of this fallen world. The point? God is closer to humanity than most of us even begin to realize.

In what ways have you personally experienced the closeness of God? In what intimate and personal ways has He touched your life? What might you need to do in order to experience the reality of His presence in an even more intimate manner?
city, they urged them, “‘Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed’” (vs. 17, NRSV).

But Lot protests. Pointing in the direction of a nearby town, Lot tries to make a deal with the angels. “‘Look, that city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one’” (vs. 20, NRSV). By implication he means that it is not as evil simply through not being as big as Sodom and Gomorrah and thus not as deserving of destruction. But size is never a criteria of good or evil in God’s eyes. “‘Let me escape there—is it not a little one? And my life will be saved!’” (vs. 20, NRSV). His dealings with the angels is a warped echo of Abram’s intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah. Intercession had been

**Inductive Bible Study**


1. In his impatience with God’s timing, Abram takes it on himself to bring about the fulfillment of God’s promise to make his descendants as innumerable as the stars. He bears a son, Ishmael, through his wife’s maidservant, Hagar. Interestingly enough, the Bible does not explicitly condemn him for doing so. The results, however, speak for themselves. What results of this course of action clearly indicate that Abram was wrong in pursuing it? Which was the greater offense: the action itself or Abram’s not trusting God to bring about His promise in His own way and time? Explain.

2. Genesis 18 has the Lord Himself appearing to Abraham and reiterating the promise to give him a child, this time specifying that Sarah would be the mother. Many believe that the Being spoken of here is Christ. What evidence do we have that this was the case? Do you agree? Why, or why not?

3. Why was God—in whatever manifestation—so free in appearing to Abraham as compared to the ways in which He communicated with His people later in the Old Testament? For example, while He spoke to Moses and the children of Israel directly, He did not appear to Moses for the most part. Later, He communicated almost entirely through prophets. What might be the causes of this development?

4. God in the Old Testament is often portrayed as being rather merciless. Does the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah support this perception? How did God’s patience and mercy in dealing with Sodom manifest itself? What do you think was really going on in Genesis 18:23-33, where Abraham appears to be attempting to change God’s mind?
On the Eve of Doom (Gen. 19:1-14)

**Read** the first seven verses of Genesis 19. What kind of picture does it present regarding the moral state of Sodom? What significance is found in the fact that men, both the young and old, came from “every quarter” of the city? What does that remind us of, from a previous time in earth’s history? *Gen. 6:5.*

Even by modern standards of immorality, which have sunk pretty low, the Sodomites were a wretched lot. How could a people become so degraded?

**Read** Ezekiel 16:49, 50. How do these verses help us understand what happened to that city? Why would these things lead to the kind of moral degradation that they did in Sodom? What lessons are in there for us?

Though according to 2 Peter 2:7, 8 Lot was a righteous man who was pained by what he saw happening in the city, he probably couldn’t have avoided being influenced by his surroundings. Who wouldn't? (John the Baptist had to live in the wilderness to escape the corruptions around him.) Perhaps that helps explain Lot’s willingness to give his virgin daughters to the mob in order to protect his guests (*Gen. 19:8*). However difficult it is for us to understand Lot’s response, it does show us how seriously he took the mob’s intent. He obviously knew what these people were capable of. As verses 9-14 show, it took the supernatural intervention of the two angels to save Lot from the mob, who had become angry at him, as well.

The pride, the fullness of bread, the “prosperous ease” certainly didn’t at once turn the Sodomites into the raging mob seen in Genesis 19. The process takes time. Look at your own life and the direction you are moving in (toward the Holy City *[Heb. 12:22, Rev. 21:2]* or toward Sodom), and the standard you use to judge your progress.
reduced to haggling. He could not grasp that God—not where he fled—was the determining factor in his salvation.

But God has greater patience than we do. The angel granted his audacious request, promising that nothing would harm Zoar (the name means “little”) (vs. 21, 22). The angel explained that he could not destroy Sodom until Lot reached safety (vs. 22). Lot should have known that if God had sent His angels to save him, He would not let anything harm him. Abraham’s nephew did not have to find his own protection and refuge.

Whereas Lot’s story teaches us not to cling too dearly to the world or it will destroy us, Abraham’s intercession on behalf of the doomed city mirrors Jesus’ loving mediation on behalf of sinners. “In the agonies of the crucifixion, Himself burdened with the awful

**Witnessing**

God has given us the ability—through hard work, smart thinking, and often being in the right place at the right time—to prosper, which, in earthly terms, usually means acquiring a higher standard of living. Depending on our culture, our financial success can be demonstrated through position in the community, land ownership, larger and more fashionable housing, expensive clothing and cars, and other accomplishments. Is the very act of acquiring such wealth and status necessarily wrong? No, of course not. However, if we are left on our own, without the constant guidance and presence of our heavenly Father in our lives, what was once a blessing will become a curse.

It all depends on the value we place on our earthly status. It comes right down to whether we can walk away from all our possessions without a second thought or whether we will end up yearning for them more than we yearn for our heavenly Father and the life He has to offer us.

Take a personal inventory this week. Ask yourself some serious questions: Do you show others that material possessions matter more than relationships? Do you spend more time on acquiring than sharing? Can you honestly say you use the bounty that God has given you to better the lives of those you know or, maybe more importantly, those you don’t know? Are you successful in thanking God daily for all His blessings, and do you demonstrate by returning to Him a faithful tithe?

Remember, “God loves you. . . . He invites you to leave those things which hinder your spiritual advancement, and to find in him that strength and consolation which you need.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 112. Dedicate your influence, your wealth, your position in life to God. You, and those you touch, will be used abundantly by Him!
Sodom Destroyed *(Genesis 19)*

**Read** Genesis 19:12-29. How do we see here even more examples of God seeking to save people despite themselves?

Had Lot’s inconsistent witness dulled the effect of his appeals? Not even the desperate visit at night could arouse his family. Lot’s children “laughed at what they called his superstitious fears. His daughters were influenced by their husbands. They were well enough off where they were. They could see no evidence of danger. Everything was just as it had been. They had great possessions, and they could not believe it possible that beautiful Sodom would be destroyed.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 160.

**Read** carefully verse 15. What principle is revealed here regarding the destruction of sin? Focus specifically on the phrase “lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.” What message is in that for us?

Jesus came in order to destroy sin, not sinners *(1 John 3:5)*; Jesus came to save the world, not to destroy it *(John 3:17)*; Jesus came to destroy the devil and the works of the devil, not human beings *(Heb. 2:14, 1 John 3:8)*.

The whole plan of salvation centers on the eradication of sin, not the eradication of people. God in the story of Sodom was trying to spare Lot the destruction that will sooner or later fall upon all iniquity. And the only way for us to be spared that doom is to flee iniquity, to cling to Jesus our Savior in faith and obedience, claiming His sinlessness and perfection in our behalf, while, at the same time, putting away all sin in our lives *(Rom. 6:12; 1 Pet. 4:1, 2)*. In the end, sin will be eradicated, once and for all. The good news of the gospel is that we don’t have to be eradicated with it.

**Read** Genesis 19:24-29. Notice the phrase “and God remembered Abraham” in the context of saving Lot. Write out a paragraph explaining how that is a symbol of the salvation and deliverance we have in Jesus and that only because of Him we can be saved in judgment day. Be prepared to share it with the class on Sabbath.
weight of the sins of the whole world, He prayed for His revilers and murderers, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ Luke 23:34.” —Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 140.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: If you have children (or pets), share their names and why you chose to give them those names. Do the names reflect character attributes that you hoped your children would have, or are they based on family history? In the midst of her rebellion and flight, Hagar encounters God. “Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees” (Gen. 16:13, NKJV). Choose and share a name you might use to describe God based on your personal experience with Him.

Thought Questions:
1. What makes you laugh? Did you laugh more easily as a child than you do now? What has made that difference? Read Genesis 17, trying to consider Abraham’s thoughts as God draws near to restate His covenant. Abraham is now ninety-nine. How does his age affect his response to God’s promise? How do you feel about the fact that Abraham “fell on his face and laughed” (Gen. 17:17)? What lessons can we learn from Abraham and this encounter? How would you explain them to a friend who is having difficulty trusting God’s promises?

2. Take a few minutes to recall some of the guests you have had at your home. If you knew they were coming, what did you do to prepare for their arrival? Abraham offered his home and hospitality to unexpected guests. After reading Genesis 18:1-8, make a list of the things he did to provide for them. Finish reading the conclusion of the story in verses 9-15. Imagine how the story might have ended if Abraham had allowed the strangers to walk by. Plan to invite a work associate or neighbor to share a Friday evening meal so that he or she might be blessed by your hospitality.

Application Question:
Consider the houses nearest your home. How many families profess faith in God? If you don’t know, what steps might you take to find out (borrow a tool or ask for advice from someone who has a beautiful lawn, etc.)? Abraham and Lot were given warning of the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Gen. 18:20; 19:12, 13). Since we know that Jesus’ return is imminent, how does that motivate our effort to meet others? Ask God to help you be more attentive to His Holy Spirit’s guidance in building saving relationships with those who do not know their danger.

Talking about Lot, Ellen White wrote: “Living in that wicked city, in the midst of unbelief, his faith had grown dim. The Prince of heaven was by his side, yet he pleaded for his own life as though God, who had manifested such care and love for him, would not still preserve him. He should have trusted himself wholly to the divine Messenger, giving his will and his life into the Lord’s hands without a doubt or a question.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 161.

“Our Saviour warned his disciples that just prior to his second coming a state of things would exist very similar to that which preceded the flood. Eating and drinking would be carried to excess, and the world would be given up to pleasure. This state of things does exist at the present time. The world is largely given up to the indulgence of appetite; and the disposition to follow worldly customs will bring us into bondage to perverted habits,—habits that will make us more and more like the doomed inhabitants of Sodom. I have wondered that the inhabitants of the earth were not destroyed, like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. I see reason enough for the present state of degeneracy and mortality in the world. Blind passion controls reason, and every high consideration is, with many, sacrificed to lust.”—Ellen G. White and James White, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, p. 53.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read aloud the paragraphs you wrote for the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. Discuss your answers.

2. What are some prevalent moral issues facing your society? How does your church react to these issues? How can we as Christians be a force for good, showing people a higher standard of morality?

3. Is there someone you know struggling with a sin that’s destroying their lives? What can you do as a class to lend help and support and encouragement as that person seeks victory?
The Triumph of Faith

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 20:1–25:10.

Memory Text: “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me” (Genesis 22:12).

In one of the greatest classics of Christian literature, *The Screwtape Letters*, British writer C. S. Lewis depicts a senior demon, Screwtape, who writes a number of letters to a junior demon, his nephew Wormwood. The letters are filled with advice on how to try to destroy the soul of a young man to whom Wormwood has been assigned.

In one section, Screwtape gives Wormwood the following advice regarding his charge: “Talk to him about ‘moderation in all things.’ If you can once get him to the point of thinking that ‘religion is all very well up to a point,’ you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all—and more amusing.”—C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), p. 46.

What a powerful thought as we continue this week with Abraham, especially because among the things we cover is the story of him and Isaac on Mount Moriah, one of the most powerful and meaningful stories, not only in the life of Abraham but in all sacred history. Whatever his faults, whatever his failures, Abraham was a man of faith, a man whose religion was the foundation of all that he was, a man whose religion was, indeed, “very well up to a point”—the point being ready to sacrifice his son at God’s command.

Moderation in *all* things? Let’s take a look.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 2.*
Lying Through Silence * (Genesis 20)

Soon after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham moved to a region near the border of Egypt, approximately eighty miles southwest from Hebron, before traveling north to Gerar, located in a fertile valley southeast of Gaza. The city-state of Gerar was then ruled by a Philistine named Abimelech.

**Read** Genesis 20. What does this tell us, again, about the humanity of even a great man of faith?

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There are a number of fascinating elements in this story, one being the relationship between God and this so-called pagan ruler.

**Read** over the whole chapter again, focusing on Abimelech. What does this chapter tell us about this king’s knowledge of the true God? What recent event might have gotten the king’s attention regarding the reality of the true God?

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Think how easily Abraham could justify his actions. If he were killed, the promise of a great nation coming from him would be lost, even though that promise alone—already given to him numerous times before—should have been more than enough to keep him from fear of a premature death (Gen. 20:11). Second, was he really lying? After all, Sarah was, as the chapter showed, his sister, or half sister. So, in one sense, by simply telling everyone “at every place whither we shall come” (vs. 13) that she was his sister, he wasn’t lying . . . was he?

What we can learn from this is that deception can come just as easily by what you don’t say. We can see here a great example of someone trying to stick to the letter of the law while missing the principle behind it entirely.

Someone once said that even “facts” come with interpretations and preconceived ideas. In what less-than-honest ways do you sometimes interpret the “facts”? Might you need to make something right in a case in which you, like Abraham, twisted the facts more by what you neglected to say than by what you actually said?
Key Text: Hebrews 11:8-11

Teachers Aims:
1. To show how God still works through human weaknesses.
2. To explain how true faith is revealed in actions.
3. To discuss Abraham’s faithfulness even in his final days.

Lesson Outline:
I. A Promise Fulfilled (Gen. 20:1-3, 21:1-21)
   A. Abraham shows his human frailty in calling Sarah his sister for the second time.
   B. Isaac is born the “son of promise.”
   C. Due to conflict in the home, Hagar and Ishmael are sent away.
   D. The Lord promises to make Ishmael a great nation.

II. A Test of Faith (Gen. 22:2)
   A. Abraham’s faith is challenged when God asks him to sacrifice his “only son,” Isaac.
   B. Isaac trustingly submits to his father, exemplifying the submission of Christ (vss. 9-11).
   C. God blesses through the obedience of faith (vss. 16-18).

III. Abraham’s Final Years (Gen. 25:8-10)
   A. Sarah dies in Hebron and is later included among the faithful in the book of Hebrews (Gen. 23:1, 2; Heb. 11:11).
   B. Abraham commissions a trusted servant to find a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:2-4).
   C. When Abraham dies, his sons bury him in the same tomb Sarah is buried in.

Summary: Abraham is faithful to the Lord until his death. Even in the midst of human weakness, God keeps His covenant with Abraham and gives him a son. This is the beginning of the promise to make a great nation from Abraham.

COMMENTARY

God’s ways are frequently beyond human understanding. Finite human beings never can understand all the factors and reasons behind anything He does. But we can trust that whatever He does, its ultimate goal is always love, grace, and salvation. God abundantly rewards such trust and faith in Him. Nowhere can we see this better illustrated than in the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah.

A “Foreshadowing”
Early one morning Abraham and Isaac set off for Mount Moriah. It must have been difficult to keep the purpose of the journey from
The Birth of Isaac

Finally, after so many years, so many disappointments, so many triumphs and failures, the child of the promise was born (Gen. 21:1-3). They named him Isaac, which means “he laughs,” serving as a reminder of Abraham’s laughter of disbelief (Gen. 17:17) when told by the Lord that he and Sarah would have a child. Indeed, with the exception of the one letter used in Hebrew for the word and, his name is spelled exactly as the Hebrew in Genesis 17:17 reads, “and he laughed.” No doubt, too, the name was also to signify the joy that he and his wife would have with the birth of the promised child.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t all joy and happiness in the home. What follows is a painful example of what it means to live with the consequences of sin, even after that sin has been forgiven.

**Read** Genesis 21:9-21. What sad events eventually followed the birth of Isaac? How did the Lord help ease Abraham’s pain at having to send his son away?

Ishmael had lived for about seventeen years with his father Abraham. How could Abraham send him away? What a sacrifice! What a price the old patriarch had to pay for a well-meaning error on his part! How ironic, too, that Sarah, who had first told him to go to Hagar, would be the one to tell him to send them away.

**How** did Paul describe the incompatibility between Abraham’s natural and spiritual descendants, and what application did the apostle make? Gal. 4:28-31.

Again, however difficult for us to understand how Abraham could have done it, what should be clear is that it never pays to distrust the Lord, that disobedience leads to pain and suffering, not just for the one who sins but oftentimes for those closest to the one who commits the sin. Certainly at the time that Abram first took Hagar as a wife, he never envisioned things coming to this.

**What’s the next hard decision you have to make?** Are you going to make a choice that will come with bad consequences you can’t even begin to imagine? How can you be sure that you are following God’s will in making your choice?
Sarah. She and the rest of Abraham’s large household must have been curious as he and Isaac loaded their pack animals. What would the youth’s mother have done had she found out? Would she have denounced God as a cruel despot who gave then snatched away? Would Abraham himself have desperately longed to share his inner struggle with her? We can only imagine what Abraham’s thoughts were going up the mountain.

Perhaps as he traveled up the mountain, his mind traveled back over the many years of God’s faithful leading. Hadn’t the Lord promised him far more than just a son to preserve the family line and pass along the family inheritance? Was he remembering how the son that God had asked him to sacrifice was the very one through which God promised to found a great nation? Isaac’s name meant laughter. But as they walked up the mountain, Abraham may have thought that “grief” would have been a better name.

Abraham’s son was reaching what the ancient world considered adulthood, of an age to soon marry and father children of his own. Abraham and Sarah would become grandparents and be assured that the family line would survive at least another generation. Furthermore, Abraham could see the beginning of that great nation that the Lord had vowed to make of him when He led him from his native land. Now God had decided to shatter everything.

Devastated, the patriarch listened in growing horror as the Lord asked him to sacrifice his special son, the child of promise. He knew about child sacrifice. It was a familiar custom even to him. The people of the surrounding nations considered it the greatest offering one could give to the gods, the most powerful sacrifice imaginable. The pharaohs depicted their military conquests through wall paintings and carvings. Some of them show besieged Canaanite cities. The ruler of the surrounded city, in an act of desperation, stands on top of the city wall, poised to hurl his son down as a child sacrifice. Surely the god he worshiped would deliver them from the Egyptians after such a sacrifice. But the God of Abraham—was He just like the other deities? Surely not!

But Abraham had heard His voice too many times for him to dismiss the divine command as only a hallucination. That voice had been too powerful a part of his life to ignore. In the past it had promised and predicted and then had demonstrated that it had the power to bring to pass what it said.

Abraham must have struggled in his mind over the Lord’s summons to sacrifice his son. It would seemingly destroy all that He had promised, and, even worse, it threatened to throw into question everything the patriarch had come to understand about the divine character. But clinging to his memory of what God had done in the past, he bowed to what the Lord asked of him.

The reader of Genesis, however, knows something that Abraham does not. Biblical authors rarely comment on the significance of the
Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah

Read  Genesis 22 prayerfully. What message, or messages, does the Word of God bring to you personally from this powerful story? What, if anything, can you take from it and apply to your own walk with the Lord?

Of the many Old Testament stories, this one is not only one of the most powerful, one of the most moving, and one of the most Messianic (in that we see the death of Jesus, God’s Son, prefigured) but also one of the most difficult to understand. Even if we grasp that Abraham’s need to display his faith (after so many repeated failures in that area), even when we understand his need to be willing to die to self and all that mattered to him—to be asked to do this by God? And to obey? Whatever else we can get from this story, it should show us all the paucity of our own faith and the realization that in the great controversy between good and evil we are dealing with issues that go far beyond what we, as sinners, can understand fully.

Danish author Søren Kierkegaard, commenting on this story, said that Abraham “left behind his worldly understanding, and he took along his faith.” What does that mean to you? How often, as a Christian, are you called to leave behind your worldly understanding and move only on faith? How are you supposed to do that?

And though in this story our focus is on Abraham, we mustn’t forget Isaac’s role too. Ellen White was so clear in Patriarchs and Prophets (p. 152) that though the young man could have fled, he submitted, even tried to help the pained and tormented old man do what he must. Isaac’s ready submission typified the future submission of the Son of God. Once more in the region of Moriah, on a hill called Golgotha, a Father was to surrender His life in His Son. While Moses, looking forward by faith, wrote, “‘On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided’” (Gen. 22:14, NIV), we can exclaim in adoration and gratitude, “On the mountain of the Lord it has been provided.”
stories they tell. But when the author does say something, it is extremely important. The biblical author begins the Mount Moriah incident by announcing that God’s command to sacrifice Isaac is only a test (Gen. 22:1). He wants readers to understand exactly what is going on so they will not misinterpret the divine character. But Abraham does not share that knowledge. He must deal with the Divine summons with only His past experience with God to guide him.

According to Hebrews 11:19, the patriarch concludes that somehow God would restore Isaac, perhaps through resurrection. (In

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Genesis 12:9-20, 20:1-7, 21:9, John 8:56, 1 Corinthians 1:25, Galatians 4:28-31

1. In Genesis 20, we see Abraham, once again, resorting to old patterns of behavior and see similar rationalizations for engaging in them. Why would Abraham deliberately take this course of action, in spite of how poorly it had served him in the past? Have you ever felt compelled to repeat immoral or destructive patterns while knowing better?

2. While Bible students and teachers have felt free to embellish the story of Isaac and Ishmael, the Bible actually tells us little about the family relationships between Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar. What does the Bible give as Sarah’s reason for wanting Hagar and Ishmael expelled from the family circle? (See Gen. 21:9, 10.)

3. In Genesis, the conflict between Isaac and Ishmael appears to be merely an unfortunate family drama or tragedy brought about by bad decisions. Paul, in Galatians 4:28-31, interprets the conflict as an allegory of the Old and the New Covenants. How does this interpretation enlighten our understanding of the covenants?

4. Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 is one of the more difficult episodes in the entire Bible. We live in a world where people commit all manner of violent or immoral acts, because they think God is telling them to do so. How would we distinguish Abraham’s action from these? Could we? Explain.

5. What does the near sacrifice of Isaac tell us about faith? At some level, faith is understandable as a rational decision to trust God. Is there a point at which it goes beyond this? Does faith ever make sense only to the person who has that faith, even appearing foolish, immoral, or insane to the world?
Faith and Works

Read Hebrews 11:17-19. Considering Abraham’s previous distrust of God’s promises, what insights do these texts add to our understanding of this incident?

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However incredible the story of Abraham and Isaac, whatever lessons we can draw from it, it should be clear that faith, saving faith, the kind of faith talked about in the New Testament (Rom. 3:28, 5:1, Gal. 3:24) is not a mere assent to beliefs, no matter how correct those beliefs are. Many of the lost will be those who knew propositional truths about God, or who even did things in His name (Matt. 7:22, 23). However intense this example, it shows that faith means obeying God and that only a faith revealed in works is a saving faith.

Read James 2:17-26. What’s the main message there? What point is he trying to make? What point is he not making? See also Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16, 17 to keep everything in proper balance.

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Sure, we are saved by faith, but a faith that is expressed in actions, a faith that allows God to work through us. Notice what happened after the angel stopped Abraham. The “angel of the Lord” then called attention twice to Abraham’s obedience as the reason for the blessings pronounced (Gen. 22:16, 18). Because Abraham had demonstrated that he was trusting and trustworthy, God was able to bless him. The point is that it’s through an obedience generated out of faith that the Lord is able to bring upon us the blessings He has promised. Thus, faith and works are, really, inseparable in the life of a believer.

What exists in your life (if anything) that you might need to sacrifice, not to be justified before God but to show that you have already been justified by Him through faith in Christ?
fact, the New Testament writer considers the Lord’s eventual halting of the sacrifice a “foreshadowing” of God’s power to raise the dead.) But even so, resurrection would have been a difficult concept for the people of Abraham’s time to grasp.

Abraham had faith in God because his years of relationship with Him had taught him that he could trust the Lord to always work things out. After all, God had already kept His promise that Sarah, though long past child-bearing age, would give birth to a son. In many other ways the Lord had demonstrated His trustworthiness.

The Lord had brought the son of promise into existence. If the God who had led Abraham to Canaan now asked for Isaac back, He would fulfill the divine promise another way. Even in his faith

**Witnessing**

Did you notice that chubby little toddler making his way up the church aisle last week? Clutched tightly in his little fist were dollar bills, given to him by church members who shared their thank offering with him. Remember how he struggled to stay on course, but his progress was unpredictable, at best? He’d take a wobbly step or two, and suddenly he’d find himself sitting down—hard! When that happened, you could tell he seemed bewildered about his lack of motor control. After a moment you watched him pick himself up and begin his unsteady progress back up the aisle. Suddenly, down he went again. Again and again he fell, picked himself up, and tried again.

Why was he so determined to reach the goal he had set for himself? You followed his line of vision to see what he was so focused on. His eyes were locked onto those of the pastor, standing at the head of the aisle, holding the children’s offering basket. You knew then that the toddler’s sole purpose for making his start-and-stop journey down the aisle was to reach the basket and to place in it his thank offering.

Finally, after a particularly hard tumble, he could not get up again. Suddenly, his father quickly came down the aisle, picked him up, and carried him to his goal. You sighed in relief as the toddler finally deposited his dollars safely in the basket!

Abraham had a painfully similar experience through life. His journey was often rough and filled with disastrous falls. Yet, although he frequently sinned miserably, he humbly and faithfully confessed his weaknesses to his heavenly Father and, once again, reconnected with Him.

These two children of God—one young and one old, witnessing some four thousand years apart—tell the same story: In the long run, the number of failures don’t count; reaching the goal is what really matters. Don’t let a day go by without sharing this good news with someone else!
The End of an Era *(Gen. 23:1–25:10)*

Abraham had returned to the land of Canaan and lived at Kiriatharba, later known as Hebron. It was here that Sarah died. Despite her faults, Sarah was included among those whose faith looked forward to dwelling forever in a “better country” *(see Heb. 11:11-16).*

**What** does it say to us that Sarah should be listed, as she was, in Hebrews 11?

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Three years after the death of Sarah, Abraham made preparations for the marriage of his son. Isaac trusted divine providence and his father to find a suitable wife. For him, the proper marriage of this son was of crucial importance.

**Why** did Abraham advise Eliezer to choose a wife from among his relatives rather than from the daughters of Canaan? Is not this being exclusive, or thinking yourself somehow superior to others? *See Gen. 24:3, 4; Deut. 7:3, 4; 1 Kings 11:4; 2 Cor. 6:14.*

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After Abraham had appointed Isaac as his undisputed legal heir and had sent his other son away richly laden with gifts, he died at the age of 175 *(Gen. 25:1-8).* Ishmael and Isaac buried their father in the purchased tomb where Abraham had buried Sarah *(vss. 9, 10).*

Before proceeding with the line of the faithful, Genesis lists the generations of those who will fade from our view *(vss. 12-18).* The Bible is focused specifically on the line of Abraham, the line that would, however fitfully, keep alive the faith and knowledge of the true God.

**Of everything that you’ve read about the life of Abraham, what’s the one point that strikes home the hardest? What’s the one lesson that, among all else, you have taken from this story that can help you in your walk with the Lord?**
Abraham probably never understood the full implication of his statement to Isaac: “‘God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son’” (Gen. 22:8, NRSV). But he knew God’s reliability, and that is the most important thing any follower of God must learn. It is the core of any true faith.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: How would you draw a picture of a lie? What colors would you use? In Genesis 20, Abraham lives an unspoken lie. We know the end of his life story. He is considered the father of the faithful. In what ways does Abraham’s growing-in-Jesus experience give you hope? Whom do you know who needs to hear the story of positive life transformation through God’s power?

Thought Questions:
1. “Laugher” is born as God promised, right on time. (The name Isaac means “laugher.”) Abraham and Sarah, with their extended family, rejoice. And Sarah said, “‘God has made me laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me’” (Gen. 21:6, NKJV). Yet, over the wonder of the celebration, a dark cloud looms. See Genesis 21:9. When have the bad choices you made early in your life come back to challenge you? Why do we still face the consequences even after we have asked for forgiveness and left a previous wrong lifestyle behind?

2. If you could choose how you would be remembered after your death, what words would embody your legacy? Sarah’s name is included among the great list of the faithful in Hebrews 11. It is said of her, “she judged Him faithful who had promised” (vs. 11, NKJV). Share a personal testimony of what you have learned about God’s faithfulness. As a class, organize a Sabbath worship service focused on God’s faithfulness. Invite your friends or neighbors to attend.

Application Question:
Relive the story of Abraham and Isaac’s testing on Mount Moriah as recorded in Genesis 22:1-17 and also in Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 13. Take a sheet of paper and record your response to how Abraham may have been feeling. Do the same thing for Isaac. Through this journey, what have you learned about recognizing and obeying God’s voice? Ask God to lead you to a deeper relationship with Him so that you will know the sound of His voice, even above the roar of the daily challenges you face.

“The instruction given to Abraham touching the sacredness of the marriage relation was to be a lesson for all ages. It declares that the rights and happiness of this relation are to be carefully guarded, even at a great sacrifice. Sarah was the only true wife of Abraham. Her rights as a wife and mother no other person was entitled to share.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 147.

“At the appointed place they built the altar and laid the wood upon it. Then, with trembling voice, Abraham unfolded to his son the divine message. It was with terror and amazement that Isaac learned his fate, but he offered no resistance. He could have escaped his doom, had he chosen to do so; the grief-stricken old man, exhausted with the struggle of those three terrible days, could not have opposed the will of the vigorous youth. But Isaac had been trained from childhood to ready, trusting obedience, and as the purpose of God was opened before him, he yielded a willing submission. He was a sharer in Abraham’s faith, and he felt that he was honored in being called to give his life as an offering to God. He tenderly seeks to lighten the father’s grief, and encourages his nerveless hands to bind the cords that confine him to the altar.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 152.

Discussion Questions:

1. How might the “sacrifice” of Ishmael in the previous chapter have helped prepare Abraham for the sacrifices and trials that would come next? What principle can you find here that could help us understand what it means to live by faith?

2. As a class, discuss the sacrifice of Isaac. How do we, in a modern context, understand this story? What lessons can we take from it for our lives today?

3. What advice do you have for someone who, in the faith, is thinking of marrying outside the faith? What cautions might be in order?
Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 25:19–29:30.

Memory Verse: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of” (Genesis 28:15).

Frenchman Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), sometimes deemed the philosopher of the French Revolution, argued that “there is no original sin in the human heart” and that human beings are all basically good. It was society, he said, that had corrupted humanity. If left to our own devices, to our own feelings and conscience, we would naturally do the right thing (all this from a man who, after fathering a number of children, dumped them all at an orphanage).

Of course, it’s hard to think of a view more contrary to Scriptures or, really, to reality. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). Or, as expressed in another context: “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (John 2:24, 25).

This week, as we continue our family saga, we get more sad glimpses into the wickedness and deceitfulness of human hearts. Pride, passion, and selfishness reign, even (more frightfully) sometimes under the justification of seeking to do God’s will.

The bright spot? Even amid all this, the Lord reveals His love, His patience, and His saving and forgiving grace for erring sinners.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 9.
Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25:19-34)

Though a twin, Esau came out first and was, therefore, counted as the oldest. As such, to him were given the special promises and privileges that accompanied the covenant first made to Abraham. “With these promises Esau and Jacob were familiar. They were taught to regard the birthright as a matter of great importance, for it included not only an inheritance of worldly wealth but spiritual pre-eminence. He who received it was to be the priest of his family, and in the line of his posterity the Redeemer of the world would come. On the other hand, there were obligations resting upon the possessor of the birthright. He who should inherit its blessings must devote his life to the service of God. Like Abraham, he must be obedient to the divine requirements. In marriage, in his family relations, in public life, he must consult the will of God.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 177, 178.

Keeping in mind Ellen White’s insights, read the verses for today. How do her words help us understand why Esau acted as he did? What lessons are in here for us? See also Heb. 12:14-17.

Genesis 25:27 contrasts the two boys. It’s interesting that the Hebrew word describing Jacob is tam, which means “complete” or “perfect” or “morally innocent.” It’s the same word, translated in Job 1:8 as “perfect,” used to describe the character of Job. Despite this depiction, he still was willing to take advantage of his brother’s weakness in order to seek for himself the birthright. Perhaps the promise made to his mother regarding him and his brother (vs. 23) made him think that he had to have the birthright in order for that promise to be fulfilled. Whatever his motives, he obviously esteemed the birthright as something to be coveted.

At the same time, Esau demonstrated he was unworthy of the birthright privilege not only by bartering it away in a most flippant manner but also by reinforcing his choice through an oath (vs. 33) and by his unperturbed departure (vs. 34; see also Gen. 26:34, 35).

However worthy the object of his desire, Jacob tried to get it through less than honorable means. How can we protect ourselves from the same faulty reasoning that the end justifies the means?
COMMENTARY

One of the greatest temptations facing believers is the desire to make sure that God does what they think He is supposed to do—or even what He promises to do. It can be extremely hard to leave things in His hands. Last week we saw the benefits of trusting in God. This week, through the stories of Rebekah and Jacob, we see the tragic consequences that result from not trusting God.

I. Running Ahead of God

Rebekah received word from God before the birth of her twin sons that the elder, or firstborn, would serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). Jacob, the younger, became her favorite. So determined was
Isaac and Abimelech *(Genesis 26)*

As in the early sojourn of Abraham, there was a famine in the land that caused Isaac to move to a new location. Perhaps because of the potential for discouragement, it was at this time that the Lord renewed with him the same covenant promises that he had made with his father, Abraham *(Gen. 26:1-5).*

**Read** verses 7-11. Where have we seen this before? What lesson can we draw from this account?

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Sometime later Isaac’s wealth increased to the point that it elicited the jealousy of the Philistines. In order to preserve peace, Isaac moved to the valley of Gerar and later moved again to Beersheba *(vss. 12-23).* This illustrates the hardship and tensions to which believers are exposed in this sin-darkened world.

**What** patriarchal practice did Isaac follow after the second divine revelation was accorded to him? What’s the importance of this practice? What is it meant to symbolize? *Vss. 24, 25; see also Eph. 5:2, Rev. 13:8.*

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Nearly a century after the treaty that Abraham had entered into with Abimelech, the ruler of Gerar, a later Abimelech, accompanied by a friend and the chief captain of his army, invited Isaac to enter into another sworn peace treaty.

**Notice what Abimelech says twice to Isaac** *(vss. 28, 29).* How do these words in many ways reflect what it means to be a witness to the Lord? What aspects of your life could someone look at and say, “You are now blessed of the Lord”? In what ways are you blessed of the Lord? Write a prayer thanking God for all that He has done for you.

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she to ensure that the prophecy took place exactly as God said it would that she was willing to use trickery and deceit, forgetting that the promise came from God and was His responsibility to fulfill.

Jacob’s family line is full of tricksters, people who try to get their way by deceit and their own wits. And the men were not the only ones guilty of it. The women could practice it, too, as we see in the cases of Rebekah and the daughter-in-law that she would never meet, Rachel (Gen. 31:33-35). Rebekah carefully coached Jacob, telling him how to deceive his father (Gen. 27:5-10). When Jacob protested that her scheme might backfire on him so that he received a curse instead of a blessing, she replied, “‘Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word’” (vs. 13, NRSV). Sadly, the ploy did exactly that. She suffered its consequences. When Esau became angry at what his mother and brother had done against him, he threatened to kill Jacob (vs. 41). Rebekah told Jacob to flee to her brother in Haran (vs. 43)—and she never saw her son again. She reaped the harvest of deceit she had sown. If only she had trusted in God and allowed Him to work on her son’s behalf. He was especially good at making those who were not firstborn first in His sight and plans.

II. Isaac’s Blessing

Despite the way Isaac’s blessing is obtained, it cannot be undone. The blessing itself invites closer scrutiny to understand why Rebekah coveted it so much for Jacob. Isaac’s blessing begins with an allusion to the true Source of all blessing—God Himself. He thinks that Jacob is Esau because of “the smell of a field” that Jacob and Rebekah have successfully duplicated. The father declares that it was “‘like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed’” (Gen. 27:27, NRSV). He recognized that the luxuriant vegetation of any field was a gift from God.

The rest of his blessing divides into two parts: fertility, the constant concern of all ancients (vss. 27, 28) and dominion (vs. 29). The patriarch calls for God to give his son the dew of heaven and the abundance of the earth. Heaven and earth would symbolize the immensity of the blessing, the two extremes representing everything that there is.

The “dew of heaven” can be a metaphor for rain, but the literal dew that formed from condensation of water vapor at night was also vital. It was especially important in Canaan during the dry season. Rain fell mainly from late fall through very early spring. The rest of the year the land experienced little or no rainfall. Vegetation survived during the dry season to a large extent because of the heavy dew that settled on the leaves and then dripped down to replenish the soil moisture. Grain and wine not only symbolized the agricultural year but were also the two major foodstuffs of the ancient Near East. The blessing promises that the land will produce abundantly.

The second part of the blessing involves both dominion over other
Faithless Schemes

In Genesis 27:1-7, Isaac permitted his tastebuds to influence his heart and conscience. He determined to bestow the birthright blessing upon his older son in spite of the Lord’s words at their birth (Gen. 25:23), Esau’s deliberate disregard of the birthright (vss. 29-34), and his ill-disposed choice of Hittite women for wives (Gen. 26:34, 35).

“Rebekah divined his purpose. She was confident that it was contrary to what God had revealed as His will. Isaac was in danger of incurring the divine displeasure and of debarring his younger son from the position to which God had called him. She had in vain tried the effect of reasoning with Isaac, and she determined to resort to stratagem.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 180.

Read the rest of the story regarding this deception (Gen. 27:8-29). Notice carefully verse 20, particularly Jacob’s answer to his father’s question. Why does this show even more just how wrong this action was?

As Isaac smelled the clothes Jacob wore, his mind was carried from the present to the future. The smell of the fields suggested to him an abundance of crops and a bounty of grain and wine (vss. 27-29, 37). Jacob was promised ultimate dominion over the nations, a plan that was reiterated and enlarged upon by later prophets and poets of Israel. Under inspiration the prophetic eye envisaged the ultimate success and supremacy of God’s people.

Read carefully the blessing bestowed by Isaac on Jacob (vss. 28, 29). What elements are found in the blessing? What is in there that would make him want it so badly?

There’s so much in there, so much that could be used for good or for bad. Even though God bestows gifts and blessings, that doesn’t automatically mean that people use them always for His glory. What kind of gifts and blessings have you received from God? How are you using them? What changes might you need to make in your use of what God has given you?
nations and within the family (including supremacy over nations born from members of the line of Abraham, such as the descendants of Ishmael). People and nations will not only bow down to the recipient of the blessing, but he will have prominence in the family of Isaac. All those who curse him will have that curse rebounded back on them, but those who bless him will be blessed in turn (vs. 29). How ironic that Jacob, the deceiver, steals what rightfully belongs to him, what God would have given him in His own time had he trusted Him. His theft secures him the birthright, but he pays bitterly for it. A penniless, homeless fugitive, he loses his brother and

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** *Genesis 25:27, 27:5-17, 27:35, Malachi 1:2, Romans 9:13*

1. Genesis 25:27 refers to Jacob as a “quiet man” (Amplified Bible). Yet, his future actions show him to be in many ways the opposite of this. In what sense is he innocent, or pure?

2. By definition, only the oldest son could have the birthright. Esau, in spite of having indisputable legal title to the birthright by virtue of being the oldest son, shows himself to be unworthy of it, especially as it applies to spiritual matters. Could the same be said about Jacob? Does it matter that Jacob appears to desire it more? Explain.

3. Genesis is not terribly clear about Rebekah’s motives in attempting to deceive Isaac into giving Jacob the birthright, making it easy enough to assume that naked ambition motivates her. Ellen White suggests that Rebekah really did have spiritual motives for this misguided course of action (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 180). Is there any indication in the biblical story itself that this might have been the case? Elaborate.

4. Why do Rebekah and Jacob believe that Jacob could receive the birthright by pretending to be Esau? Why do Esau and Isaac accept the validity of the transfer of birthright, from Esau to Jacob, after the fact? Do they misunderstand the nature of the birthright? Why does the author of Genesis also seem to accept their misunderstanding as given?

5. Rebekah’s and Jacob’s actions are perhaps the first recorded example of people willfully mistaking their will for God’s will. Yet, ultimately Jacob does become a great patriarch, after a long and difficult process. Why do you think that God continues to bless Jacob in spite of his shortcomings?
The Price of Duplicity (Gen. 27:30-46)

Twice now we’ve seen Jacob take advantage of the weakness of others in order to obtain what he wanted. What a sorry example. That he, though, should nevertheless be one of the founding patriarchs says a lot about God’s grace, especially for those who truly repent of their sins. However, as the Bible shows numerous times, the forgiveness of sin doesn’t automatically equate with the nullification of the consequences of sin.

What made this deception even all the more foolish was that it should have been obvious that it would be uncovered, that Esau and Isaac would eventually know what happened. Apparently, though, both mother and son were determined to get what they wanted, regardless of the cost. What an important lesson here for all of us: *Think through carefully what you are about to do!*

Perhaps the saddest thing, too, about these events (including chapter 25) is that there are no innocents. All four of the people here, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau were guilty of wrongdoing.

**Next** to each name, write down the wrong they did. What was at the heart of all these actions?

Isaac

Rebekah

Jacob

Esau

In the end, what we see here is pure selfishness, people wanting what they want for themselves, regardless of whether their actions are right or wrong. What’s even more frightening is that, in some cases, they were actually acting according to what they believed were God’s wishes. Yet, look at the results. Though in verse 45 she tells Jacob to flee and she’ll call him back later, nothing in the Bible indicates that Rebekah was ever to see this son again.

Go over the list of sins you listed above. What drove each one—pride, greed, passion, whatever? Which of these does Satan use with greatest success in your own experience? Why is death to self at the foot of the Cross your only hope for victory in these areas? How can you better avail yourself of the power promised us in the Word (1 Cor. 10:13)?
almost his life and never sees his mother alive again.

**III. Jacob’s Ladder**

The image of a stairway, or ladder, that Jacob saw at the place he later named Bethel (“House of God”), where he fled his brother’s wrath, would have been a familiar one to the people of his world. The Akkadian counterpart to the Hebrew word for “stairway” designates in Mesopotamia what the messengers of the gods used when they wanted to pass back and forth between this world and the realm of the gods. The Babylonians sought to make such a stairway literal and physical through the ziggurats they built in many of their cities. A ziggurat was a pyramid-like mud-brick structure that supported a stairway to a shrine on the top. Deities could use the stairway to descend to the temple and town below.

In his dream Jacob saw the divine messengers (the Hebrew word for “angel” and “messenger” is the same) going up and down the stairway on their missions for the Lord. Interestingly, God stands beside

**Witnessing**

“From the beginning of time human beings have searched for ways to reach heaven, to be ‘at home’ with God. . . . The mystical ladder, which is Christ Himself, is what links us to the Divine. Heaven and earth touch in two places—the horizon of the past and the horizon of the future. How, then, may we link ourselves with heaven in the present? For this we need Jacob’s ladder. Three things bring it into our possession and set it firmly down in our lives:

1. God’s daily Providence supplies the necessary connection.  
2. Jesus mediates on our behalf, a firm link between us and God.  
3. Our own desire for spiritual things helps us value the ladder.

One must climb a ladder single file. Other people will be above and some below, but we have no room for a companion alongside us. That is, we must follow through with our decision to ascend the ladder entirely on our own, but the ascent brings us to a glorious destination at the top!”—Dorothy Minchin-Comm, *Glimpses of God* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 296.

Because God has revealed to us the intimate connection between heaven and earth, the blessing of this connection must be shared with others. How can we best share this good news with others? The way we live our everyday lives tells others whether there is a divine Presence always with us. Our choice of friends and associates also demonstrates to others whether our hearts and minds are focused just on earthly pleasures or are locked on to heaven’s joys and blessings. Finally, the way we relate to those around us, through loving words and compassionate actions, is a clear indication of the condition of our hearts.
Jacob’s Ladder  *(Genesis 28)*

**Note** the fatherly instruction and blessing with which Isaac sent Jacob to Mesopotamia *(Gen. 28:1-5)*. Why should this point about marriage be so important?

After all this duplicity and deceit, Jacob flees his family. Yet, it’s obvious that God is not through with him. In a dream the Lord appears to the young man and gives him some wonderful assurances and promises.

**Read**  *Genesis 28:10-15*. Why do you think the Lord would promise so much to someone like Jacob? What does this tell us about grace?

Ellen White writes that, before he slept that night, Jacob “with weeping and deep humiliation” confessed his sin and asked the Lord for some evidence that he was not “utterly forsaken.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 183. The dream was, she wrote, the response to his repentance.

The dream of the ladder, of the angels ascending and descending, was a partial revelation of the plan of salvation. No matter how far sin had separated humanity from heaven, Jesus bridged the gap; He is the ladder between heaven and earth; His perfect righteousness was enough to reconcile a sinful world with a Holy God *(2 Cor. 5:18, 19)* and to justify before God all those who accept by faith what Christ has done for them *(Rom. 3:28-30, Rom. 4:5, Gal. 3:24)*.

Thus, many years before the Cross, we are shown the close connection between heaven and earth; we are shown that we are not forsaken, that we are not alone, and that God is intimately involved in what happens here.

> Without revelation, we could have cause for such despair: mortal beings living on a tiny planet in a cold, vast universe that, in and of itself, doesn’t seem to care at all about us. Revelation, however, tells us differently; revelation gives us a new way of interpreting events in our world. How, in your own walk with the Lord, have you experienced the closeness of heaven to earth? How has God shown you, personally, that He is close? Be prepared to share your answers with the class on Sabbath.
the stairway instead of on it (Gen. 28:12, 13). He does not need such a thing to travel back and forth between heaven and our world. Nor does He require some sacred spot to reach us but can be anywhere He wills. Jacob learns a lesson that the Lord would have us know: No matter how far we’ve fallen, God is ever reaching out to us, calling us to repentance, yearning to restore us and heal us from our backsliding.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** You have heard the comment “a chip off the old block.” How are you like your parents? God talks about the sins of the father being repeated by the children (Exod. 34:5-7). How does this dynamic play into the story of Isaac and Abimelech? Compare Genesis 26:1-17 with Genesis 20. How do these stories show God bringing good out of human failure?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Twins intrigue us. The concept of having someone else in the world who is so genetically connected invites our investigation. Jacob and Esau did not share the bond we associate with twins. Discuss what went wrong by reviewing their story in Genesis 25:19-34. “The babies jostled each other” (vs. 22, NIV), even in their mother’s womb. What caused the disconnect between Jacob and Esau? How do we avoid similar negative interpersonal dynamics in our families and churches?

2. What is your favorite color? What other things do you prefer? The concept of favorites becomes negative in the realm of relationships. None of us wants to be the ignored or the unvalued family member. We see the hurt and destruction that choosing favorites caused in Isaac’s family (Gen. 25:28). What did God do to show that He values each individual? How do we live out God’s example? Who needs to know you value them?

**Application Question:**

Look up the word *duplicit* in the dictionary. Then read the story of Jacob and Rebekah’s plotting in Genesis 27. Why did they feel they had to help God fulfill His purpose for Jacob’s life? Where have we seen this same kind of human intervention in God’s purposes before in the book of Genesis? See Genesis 16. How do we keep from running ahead of God, using negative means in order to fulfill His divine purposes? Spend some time with God committing your life and impatience to Him. Write a covenant entrusting your life to His direction. Reread it whenever you are tempted to rush ahead of His timing.

“Jacob and Rebekah succeeded in their purpose, but they gained only trouble and sorrow by their deception. God had declared that Jacob should receive the birthright, and His word would have been fulfilled in His own time had they waited in faith for Him to work for them. But like many who now profess to be children of God, they were unwilling to leave the matter in His hands.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 180.

“In this vision the plan of redemption was presented to Jacob, not fully, but in such parts as were essential to him at that time. The mystic ladder revealed to him in his dream was the same to which Christ referred in His conversation with Nathanael. Said He, ‘Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.’ John 1:51. Up to the time of man’s rebellion against the government of God, there had been free communion between God and man. But the sin of Adam and Eve separated earth from heaven, so that man could not have communion with his Maker. Yet the world was not left in solitary hopelessness. The ladder represents Jesus, the appointed medium of communication. Had He not with His own merits bridged the gulf that sin had made, the ministering angels could have held no communion with fallen man. Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 184.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, discuss your answers to the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson.

2. What makes us think that in order to do God’s will, we can use means that go against what God teaches? Why is it so easy to fall into that trap? What other examples do we have, either from the Bible or elsewhere, of this happening? How might we, either as individuals or as a church, be tempted to do the same thing?
Jacob Became Israel

Lesson 11 *December 9-15

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Genesis 29–33.

Memory Text: “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Genesis 32:28).

Jacob’s 20 years of service in Mesopotamia were characterized by jealousy, contention, and intrigue. One sister sought to outdo the other in the number of sons she bore as both vied for first place in their husband’s affections. Son-in-law and father-in-law shone in their attempts to deceive each other, with Laban manifesting interest only in his own advancement. The biblical story notes more faith in potions and human schemes than in God. Again, how little has changed in thousands of years.

Yet, while these same chapters reveal how groundless is trust in human power, they reveal how certain is the reality of the divine promises of mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance (how fortunate for us that hasn’t changed either!). Indeed, even amid all these sad stories of human faithlessness, deceit, jealousy, and intrigue, we can see the mercy of God at work, a stunning and powerful testament to God’s grace for fallen human beings.

This is seen, perhaps, most vividly in Jacob’s night of wrestling. Here, again, we can see just how close the Lord can come to those who in true faith and repentance seek Him. At Jabbok, repentant Jacob became Israel, and God’s plan triumphed in spite of the apparently unpromising human material with which He had to work.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 16.
Family Woes

In the story of Jacob and Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29), there’s more deception, only now Jacob is the victim instead of the perpetrator. Maybe he learned some lessons about deception after being on the receiving end of it.

Jacob’s marriage to two sisters, which later Mosaic law prohibited while the first sister was alive (Lev. 18:18), was marred by a great deal of intrigue, jealousy, bickering, and sadness. God allowed this practice; He also allowed the bitter consequences that always seemed to follow it.

In a society in which children signified God’s favor and attracted the husband’s love, God blessed Leah with several children. The names given to the children of both wives and maidservants reflect the feelings of Leah and Rachel at the birth of those infants and testified to the contention that existed between them. The names either are derived from or resemble the sound of the Hebrew verbs associated with the names.

Read Genesis 30:1-4. Where have we seen this practice before? What does it mean that children keep repeating the sins of the parents?

Read Genesis 30:5-13. What sinful force is driving these actions?

By the end of this section, Jacob had fathered the children of four different women, for Rachel eventually conceived and bore Joseph (Gen. 30:22-24). Thus, he now lived in a single home with four women, some loved more than others, some holding higher “status” than others, yet all the mothers of his twelve children. Talk about a formula for contention, jealousy, and intrigue! All this would later bear bitter fruit, especially in the life of Jacob, who should have known better and who, having been given promises by God (Gen. 28:10-22), should have trusted in those promises without having to resort to polygamy.

What challenges are you facing, right now, that make it difficult to live by faith rather than by sight? How can you learn to trust in God’s promises so that you don’t resort to the wrong means in order to see those promises fulfilled?
Key Text: Genesis 29:1, 13, 14

Teachers Aims:
1. To examine the tragic effects of deception.
2. To affirm that the Lord never forsakes Jacob and is the source of his prosperity.
3. To show how God can use time to bring about healing and forgiveness.

Lesson Outline:
I. A Divided Home (Gen. 29:15-31)
   A. Jacob dwells with his Uncle Laban, and works for seven years to marry Laban’s daughter Rachel.
   B. When Laban deceives Jacob by giving him Leah instead of Rachel, Jacob works another seven years for Rachel.
   C. Leah bears children, but Rachel is barren, causing conflict and competition between the two women.

II. Jacob’s Prosperity (Gen. 31:1-7, 17, 18)
   A. Jacob works another six years for Laban (vs. 38) and increases his flock.
   B. Jacob attributes his prosperity to God’s blessing.
   C. Jacob takes his family and possessions and leaves the house of Laban to return to his homeland.

III. From Fear to Faith (Gen. 32:24-28)
   A. Jacob hears of Esau and his army approaching and is afraid for his life (vss. 6, 7).
   B. Jacob wrestles with the Lord by night, and the Lord changes his name to Israel—“prince with God”—for he has struggled with God and with men and has prevailed.
   C. Jacob and Esau are reunited and make peace with each other (Gen. 33:1-17).

Summary: Jacob flees to his Uncle Laban’s house and marries Leah and Rachel, for whom he must labor 14 years. The Lord is with Jacob and makes him prosperous in the house of Laban until he finally returns to his homeland with his family and all of his possessions.

COMMENTARY

No matter how far he flees, Jacob can’t outrun his past. It dogs him to his Uncle Laban’s. Far from finding a haven there, Jacob once again tastes the bitterness of deception. This time he is on the receiving end as the crafty and wily Laban first dupes him into marrying the wrong daughter and then cheats him again and again over wages during long years of service. Each trial forcibly brings to Jacob’s mind how his own deception grieved the heart of God. Humiliating as these trials are, God lovingly permits them in order to work a deep repentance in Jacob’s heart, a repentance that culminates in a night of spiritual anguish in which Jacob wrestles with the Angel and prevails.
Jacob’s Wages *(Gen. 30:25-43)*

**How** did the schemers, Laban and Jacob, attempt to outsmart each other after Jacob had requested permission for himself and his family to return to his native country? *Vss. 26-43.*

The form of payment agreed on extended Jacob’s stay for another six years *(Gen. 31:41).* Jacob’s request appears magnanimous when we realize that in the Near East “goats, as a rule, are black or dark brown, rarely white or spotted with white, and that sheep are for the most part white, seldom black or speckled.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary,* vol. 1, p. 394. As Laban would be left with all the pure-color animals, the deal seemed advantageous to Jacob’s father-in-law.

**How** did Laban seek to prevent any off-color characteristics being bred back into the pure-color stock? *Gen. 30:35, 36.*

**To what** ancient superstition did Jacob resort after any possible attempt at selected breeding had been thwarted by Laban’s separation of the stock? *Vss. 37-43.*

Jacob, as well as Laban, seemed to be unaware of the fact that even those animals that appeared to be pure in color still carried in them recessive color characteristics that could be transmitted to their offspring. Being at a loss as to what he should do, Jacob took refuge in the mistaken belief that vivid sights experienced by a mother during conception or pregnancy would mark her offspring.

**While** to all intents and purposes Jacob’s stratagems appeared to meet with success *(vs. 43),* what message did God convey to the patriarch in a dream? *Gen. 31:7-12.*

Jacob attributed his success to God’s blessing *(vss. 7, 9),* and the Lord blessed him in spite of his superstitious beliefs *(vs. 12).* Indeed, the dream of verses 10-12 may have been intended to explain to the patriarch how the recessive off-color characteristics were passed on by the pure-color parents. God used the occasion for a miracle and blessed Jacob, not because of his skill or ingenuity but in order to thwart Laban’s exploitation.

Even despite all of Jacob’s mistakes, the Lord was still with him. What hope does this offer you, despite the mistakes you have already made?
**Meeting His Match**

The more Laban cheats his nephew, the more God blesses Jacob. Jacob’s life becomes an unending struggle with that equally cunning trickster. Finally, when Laban’s jealousy threatens Jacob’s safety, he and his family flee back to Canaan.

On the way home, Jacob receives word that the twin he cheated twenty years ago, the brother who threatened to kill him, now advances in his direction with 400 men (Gen. 32:6, 33:1). Jacob agonizes in prayer that night. Alone, the weight of his past sins crushing him, he pleads with God to soften his brother’s rage. Inspiration tells us that Jacob beseeches God at midnight, an especially fitting time, considering how the darkness of the hour mirrors the despair that threatens to overwhelm his soul. Suddenly, Jacob feels a hand on his shoulder. His mind already a little wild with despair and bitterness over past sins that now expose his family to danger, Jacob thinks he’s under attack. He wrestles the stranger with a strength made fierce from grief and desperation. At daybreak, the stranger touches his thigh with His finger, and Jacob is instantly crippled. Jacob now knows he is wrestling with no ordinary man but with God.

A strange thing happens. The Angel says “ ‘Let Me go’ ” (Gen. 32:26, NKJV).

Let me go?

This from the God who says “Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me” (Isa. 27:5) and bids us to say of Him, with the psalmist, “Thy right hand shall hold me” (Ps. 139:10)? This from the God who the Bible teaches is yearning for us to come to Him? In light of these texts, doesn’t “Let Me go” seem at odds with God’s desire to draw us to Him? So why, then, would the same One who says “Come unto Me” (Matt. 11:28) tell Jacob to “let Me go?”

It is easy to overlook these words, because the providential outcome of Jacob’s story overshadows the strange details. Some commentators believe that the reason why the Angel wanted to withdraw before daybreak may have been because He did not wish to have others witness the scene, or perhaps he wanted to prevent Jacob from seeing His face (see The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 406). On careful examination, this strange phrase yields a spiritual lesson, as well, one that beautifully, and graphically, illustrates how God justifies and sanctifies us through faith.

Perhaps God tells Jacob to let Him go because as sinful, fallen beings, we have no right to hold onto a holy God. According to the law, whose penalty for breaking it is death, sinners deserve to be shut out of the presence of a pure and holy God. In all of our sinfulness, we are not worthy of the mercy of God or His presence. “Let me go” perhaps represents Jesus in His role as Judge declaring the justness of the law that says we deserve death. Our efforts cannot free us from this guilt; Jacob wrestled all night with God but could not prevail anymore than we can prevail with God in our own righteousness to earn what God alone freely gives us: unmerited favor, or grace.
Jacob’s Flight to Canaan  (*Genesis 31*)

**Read**  *Genesis 31:1-16.* What happened that prompted Jacob to finally leave?

As a result of his greed, Laban alienated his daughters and changed Jacob’s wages ten times. Laban’s absence provided the opportunity for Jacob to leave Mesopotamia (*vss. 17-21*). Rachel’s theft of her father’s household deities may testify to the fact that her beautiful appearance concealed a half-converted heart. After thirteen years of marriage, she still had not submitted fully to the God worshiped by her husband (*vs. 19*).

**What** sanctimonious accusation did Laban level against Jacob when he overtook him after covering a distance of more than three hundred miles? *Vss. 22-30.*

Conscious of his innocence, Jacob then invoked the death penalty upon the one in whose possession the household gods were to be found (*vs. 32*). While such a penalty was in harmony with Mesopotamian law, it was as foolish and rash a decision as was that of Jacob’s sons years later (*Gen. 44:9*). Rachel’s ruse demonstrated that she was the daughter of Laban, partaking of his character (*Gen. 31:32-35*). Since Laban was unable to support any of his charges, Jacob reprimanded his father-in-law angrily and attributed his own success to the God of his father (*vss. 36-42*).

**Read** carefully Jacob’s reply to Laban (*vss. 36-42*). What can we learn from it about the character of Jacob that helps explain God’s blessing on him?

In the end, despite Jacob’s innocence, he ultimately gave all the credit to the Lord. This shows that, whatever his mistakes, he knew the Lord and the reality of the Lord working in his life. Despite his faults, he was seeking to live by faith. How important that we all have the same experience for ourselves, that of having “the fear of Isaac” (*vs. 42*) with us.
Thus, Jesus the Judge serves also as our Mediator, giving a forgiveness that is not deserved—never can be earned, a forgiveness that foreshadows His work at the Cross. Right before this, God touches Jacob with His finger. This is significant, because we are told that the finger of God wrote the law on the tablets of stone. It is the finger of God that now touches the thigh of Jacob and cripples him. Before a holy law that demands justice for our sins, we are all cripples, unable to stand in our own righteousness. It is only when we come to God,

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** *Genesis 30:25-43, 32:30, Malachi 3:2, 1 Timothy 3:2*

1. When Jacob goes to live with Laban, we once again see God’s will manifesting itself in spite of, and even through, human schemes, superstitions (*Gen. 30:37-39, for example*), and questionable cultural practices. Why does it appear as though God supported these things? How do you see God’s will manifesting itself today in our own or in other cultures?

2. Seventh-day Adventists and most other Christians condemn polygamy and require people converting from religions or cultures that permit it to eschew it. Yet, Jacob and other biblical figures often were polygamous. How do we reach the conclusion that God disapproves of polygamy? Can we see a clear or implied condemnation in the Bible, in either the Old or the New Testaments? Explain.

3. Previous incidents in Jacob’s life definitely suggest that although he has a real and active faith in God, he also places a great deal of reliance on his own ingenuity that often degenerates into scheming. Are his efforts to win over Esau (*Gen. 32:13-21*) an example of this, or are they, rather, examples of prudence? If so, might this not show how God can turn our weaknesses into strengths? Explain.

4. One of the strangest episodes in Genesis is Jacob’s struggle with the Angel, who was God the Father or Christ. What does it mean in this context to struggle with God? Does this have any application to our own experience? In what sense can we be said to struggle with God? Is it literally an adversarial situation? Explain.

5. At the end of this long, strange night, Jacob insists that the Angel (God the Father or Christ) bless him. The Angel does so by giving him a new name, Israel, because Jacob has struggled with God and “‘prevailed’” (*Gen. 32:28, NKJV*). How does Jacob “prevail,” since it is absurd to suggest that he is somehow superior to God?
Jacob and Esau (Gen. 32:1–32)

Soon after he separates from Laban and is now on his own after so many years, Jacob is met by two angels (Gen. 32:1, 2). Though the text doesn’t say what, if anything, that they said to him, no doubt their presence at that place certainly gave him some courage and confidence. Perhaps that explains why, in the next verse, he decides to send messengers to his brother.

**Notice** that in the message he calls himself “thy servant Jacob” (vs. 4). Why do you think he would use that term with his brother? *See Gen. 25:23; 27:29, 37.*

After the messengers return, their words are ominous. They gave no reply from Esau to the friendly message Jacob had sent. Instead, they say that Esau is coming toward Jacob with 400 men. No wonder Jacob was “greatly afraid and distressed” (vs. 7).

**Read** Jacob’s prayer in verses 9-12. What are the basic elements of the prayer? What was he praying for? What promises was he claiming? How did the prayer show his dependence upon the Lord?

However sincere and heartfelt the prayer, Jacob was also going to use some diplomacy and wisdom (vss. 13-21). He had hoped that with all these gifts he could “appease” (vs. 20) his brother. Perhaps there’s a lesson here: Sure, we need to pray, we need to lean on the Lord, but at the same time we need to do all that we can within our power, all that is in accordance with God’s will, to see that prayer answered.

**Jump** ahead to Genesis 33. What can we see in the interaction between both these brothers to show that they were changed men since the last time they had seen each other?

Regardless of whatever spiritual growth both had over the years, time also tends to heal wounds. What can you do, until time applies its healing balm, to help alleviate whatever pain you might be feeling over past wrongs?
broken in spirit, as Jacob’s body was broken in strength, acknowledging our weakness, and holding on to God with great faith that we prevail: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

The law that once crippled us is now “marrow to thy bones” (Prov. 3:8), kept by Christ in the heart. Now the darkness of the soul becomes daybreak. Isaiah, looking back centuries later on this midnight struggle in which the dark despair that surrounded Jacob lifted at dawn, wrote, “Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isa. 44:21, 22).

**Witnessing**

The sun. Center of our solar system, created by God on the fourth day of Creation week. Provided to warm our earth, to coax living things to grow and develop. Ordained to mark time and the seasons. A powerful, pulsing force affecting, both positively and negatively, our daily lives on this planet.

The sun emits rays so powerful, and potentially damaging, that looking directly at it can cause irreparable damage to our eyes. So, while we feel its warmth and daily observe its positive benefits—including its stimulation of vitamin D production in the skin, needed for healthy bodies, and its activation of the process of photosynthesis, leading to vibrant plant life—we wear sunglasses for protection and avoid looking directly at the sun.

So it is with the face of God. His countenance is so radiant that to look on it without a filter is impossible. God, however, has provided us with a perfect filter—Christ Jesus, Savior of humankind. Through Christ, our Intermediary, we are able to see the true nature and character of God.

Jesus Christ is one with the Father. He speaks for the Father. He acts on His Father’s behalf. He reaches out to each of His broken children here on earth in the name of His Father. Through Him, we have the ability and the means to communicate with our Father; from Christ we learn of our Father’s great love for each of us.

As our Advocate, Christ strives with His Father on our behalf. We, however, must choose to accept and follow the Father and the plan of salvation He and the Son have provided.

During the coming week, make a concerted effort to reach out to someone who is struggling with the decision to accept Jesus. Make this individual a focal point in your daily prayers. He who created the sun and all its power will hear each and every prayer.
Jacob’s Night of Fighting and Faith

Read  Genesis 32:23-32. What does this account say to you? What’s the lesson you can learn from this story about your own “struggles” with God?  See also Hos. 12:4.

Ellen White is clear that Jacob was wrestling with Christ, the “‘Angel of the covenant.’”—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 197. No wonder that twice in the depiction of the night of wrestling the texts state that it was indeed God who had appeared to Jacob that night. Here, again, we see just how up close and personal the Lord is willing to get with His people.

What is the significance of the name change?

As Jacob perceived that he had struggled with a supernatural being, he pleaded for a blessing (vs. 26). His petition and perseverance were rewarded by a change of name. No longer would his name be Jacob (“to seize the heel” and by extension “to overreach” or “to deceive”). Now it would be Israel (“he strives with God”).

Read  verse 30. What meaning can you draw from the words that Jacob uttered? How could that apply to us today?

Jacob, when it was all over, said that he had seen the face of God and lived. In a sense, this is the same opportunity offered to all humanity through the death of Jesus. Jesus was God in the flesh, and through His life and substitutionary death He brought reconciliation between heaven and earth. Because of Jesus and what He has done, we all can, in a sense, “see the face of God” and live. Our past sins, like Jacob’s past sins, no longer have to guarantee our destruction before the face of Him who is “a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29).

In what ways have you been striving with God? What does it mean to strive with God? Might you even come away from such striving, like Jacob, with a “limp”? 
God changes Jacob’s name, as he did Abraham’s, Sarah’s, and Peter’s—a symbol of how God had changed their lives. In place of the heart of a thief and a trickster, God transplants the divine nature. Though crippled and in pain, Jacob is able to face the coming of his brother with faith and peace, for he has “struggled with God and with men, and . . . prevailed” (Gen. 32:28). Jacob’s struggle and victory is to be the experience of all who await the second coming of Jesus.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Tell your class about your first job. How old were you, and what were your wages? Jacob fled from his father’s house as a consequence of his deception. Working for Laban, he became the victim of deception and falsehood. How do we keep from becoming bitter when we are victims of injustice? Review Jacob’s story in Genesis 29–31, comparing it with Christ’s undeserved betrayal recorded in Matthew 26. What principles did Jesus portray that should guide our reactions?

**Thought Questions:**

1. “‘I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go’” (Gen. 28:15, NIV). Jacob was in a difficult situation because of his own choices and behaviors, as well as Laban’s character. Yet, he claimed God’s promise and acted to care for his family. Read Genesis 30:25-43. In class, discuss Jacob’s breeding techniques. How has God blessed you even after you have made mistakes? What does this unusual story tell us about God’s concern for His flawed children?

2. Wrestling is a physical sport often done for entertainment and financial rewards. This was not the case with Jacob. Read the account of Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32:22-32 and in Ellen G. White’s *Patriarch’s and Prophets*, chapter 18. What in Jacob’s personality made it necessary for God to use this method of working with him? What personal applications can you make?

**Application Question:**

Despite the whole story, one could argue that Esau had every reason to hate his brother, Jacob. Jacob prepared to meet Esau with these words of reconciliation: “‘Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes’” (Gen. 32:5b, NIV). He also sent gifts; tangible symbols of repentance. Has someone wronged you? Or have you wronged another and not yet reconciled? Regardless of who has wronged whom, in prayer, ask God to prepare you to take bold steps of service toward that person. Ask Him to send His Holy Spirit to touch both hearts, yours and that individual’s.

“Though Jacob had left Padan-aram in obedience to the divine direction, it was not without many misgivings that he retraced the road which he had trodden as a fugitive twenty years before. His sin in the deception of his father was ever before him. He knew that his long exile was the direct result of that sin, and he pondered over these things day and night, the reproaches of an accusing conscience making his journey very sad. As the hills of his native land appeared before him in the distance, the heart of the patriarch was deeply moved. All the past rose vividly before him. With the memory of his sin came also the thought of God’s favor toward him, and the promises of divine help and guidance.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 195.

“Jacob had received the blessing for which his soul had longed. His sin as a supplanter and deceiver had been pardoned. The crisis in his life was past. Doubt, perplexity, and remorse had embittered his existence, but now all was changed; and sweet was the peace of reconciliation with God. Jacob no longer feared to meet his brother. God, who had forgiven his sin, could move the heart of Esau also to accept his humiliation and repentance.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 198.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, discuss the actions of Jacob in preparing to meet Esau. Why did he work so hard to try to appease his brother? Shouldn’t the promises that God had made to him been enough to cause him to move ahead only by faith? Was he showing a lack of faith by his actions, or was it faith in action?

2. Ask those willing to talk about an occasion when time healed some painful wound. What lessons can be learned from those experiences? What can we do to help people hurting from wounds that can take a long time to heal?
From Prison Cell to Palace

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 37:2–41:40.

Memory Text: “There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9).

The story of Jacob continues, with twists and turns that, again, contrast the depravity of humanity with the goodness and mercy of God.

Genesis 34 tells of the rape of Jacob’s daughter Dinah by a local ruler and the subsequent massacre of all the city’s males by two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi. Jacob, fearing reprisal, flees and returns to Bethel (Genesis 35), where, despite all these horrendous events, the Lord again appears to him and reaffirms the covenant promises: “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land” (vss. 11, 12).

The rest of Genesis 35 deals with the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel. Mention is also made of Reuben, who “lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine” (vs. 22). The chapter ends with Jacob reuniting with Isaac, 180 years old, who dies and is buried by his two sons.

Genesis 36 covers the genealogy of Esau, the part of the family that, basically, fades from the immediate scene. Scripture then resumes (Genesis 37) with Jacob and his “chosen” seed.

A lesson in all this?

If, amid so much sin, God can nevertheless fulfill His will, imagine what would happen if all those who profess His name actually obeyed Him as He asks.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 23.
The Dreamer

Read Genesis 37 and then answer the following questions:

1. Why did Joseph’s brothers hate him so much?

2. How did Joseph aggravate the situation?

3. Read verses 21, 22. What irony exists in the fact that, of all the brothers, Reuben was the one who tried to do what was right?

4. Read verses 25-28. Why do you think they decided not to kill him?

5. Look back over Jacob’s life. In what ways might he have brought this tragedy upon himself by his past actions and mistakes?

However horrific this story, considering the background of this family, it shouldn’t be all that surprising. Jealousy, violence, and deceit marked these people in one way or another from the earliest days. And these boys—though raised by a father who worshiped the true God, who even received special revelations from God—showed that they themselves didn’t know God, nor had they experienced the conversion of heart that’s essential for all who truly want to serve Him.

Look at how far uncontrolled sin (in this case jealousy) took these people. What message should this story have for each of us regarding where sin, unless dealt with, can lead?
The opening verses of the Joseph story depict a family destroying itself. We see how the harmful effects of partiality play out in the lives of Jacob and his sons, with disastrous effects. But even so, God is able to bring blessings out of our disasters, as he did with Joseph, who eventually was able to declare to the brothers who sold him into slavery, “Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:5). But to trace that grief back to its origin takes us to the heart of a father who, in the words of Shakespeare, “loved not wisely but too well.”
Sin With the Canaanites

Read Genesis 38. What is the essence of this story? What does it tell us about the character of Judah?

For some reason the story of Genesis 38 interrupts the Joseph story. Perhaps, if nothing else, the Lord wanted to contrast the immorality of Joseph’s betrayer, Judah, with the moral character of the betrayed, Joseph.

Maybe even more important, Genesis 38 also helps us understand “that the sons of Jacob, forgetting the sacred vocation of their race, were in danger of perishing in the sins of Canaan. Had not God in mercy interposed to bring about the removal of the whole house of Jacob to Egypt, the chosen race might have succumbed to the corrupting influence of Canaanite customs. Thus, chapter 38 is an integral part of the early history of Israel.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 434.

However sinful Judah’s actions were, how does he, even amid all this, show some moral fiber? See vs. 26; see also Gen. 37:26.

After being discovered, Judah could do little but admit his guilt. Again, as in the plot against Joseph, he revealed a spirit of fair play and sincerity beneath his sometimes scandalous and corrupt conduct. His frank confession, his subsequent treatment of Tamar, and his special place in the ancestral line of Christ (Gen. 49:10) indicate a thorough reform on his part. A character more excellent than that of his older brothers qualified him for the leadership of the family and his posterity for leadership in Israel (see Gen. 49:3, 4, 8-10).

Why must we be so careful in not passing judgment upon people? Matt. 7:1. How can we differentiate between judging actions and judging people? Why is that distinction so important?
I. A Family Destroying Itself

Jacob always loved Rachel more than Leah, and he continues to display that love even after Rachel’s death. He manifests clear favoritism toward her two children, Joseph and Benjamin. Scripture first introduces Joseph as a 17-year-old shepherd helping some of his half brothers. Apparently they do something that disturbs Joseph, and he reports it to his father (Gen. 37:2). If Reuben’s sin is any indication of the character of the rest of the brothers, it is no surprise that Joseph brings back an unfavorable report. Consequently, some have seen him as a snitch. But Inspiration tells us that Joseph loves his brothers. He can’t bear to see them sin against God. He pleads with them to change. His exhortations go ignored. He confides in his father, hoping Jacob will persuade them to change. But Joseph’s good intentions backfire. His report shames his brothers in their father’s eyes, and they hate him for it.

Jacob dotes on Joseph because “he was the son of his old age” (vs. 3). But Inspiration tells us that this favoritism is more than just strong affection for the son of his favorite wife. In Joseph, Jacob sees a thirst and hunger for God. Joseph has a far different character than his brothers. A spirit of godliness dwells in him; he is pure, joyous, active, diligent, morally earnest, gentle, faithful, and truthful. He takes to heart the stories that his father tells of God’s mercy and providence, and his heart yearns for God. Jacob sees the same love for God in his son that he himself holds so precious. No wonder Jacob loves him so!

To show his love, Jacob has “a long robe with sleeves” (vs. 3, NRSV) made for his beloved son. Traditional translations render it as a coat of many colors, but it is the material, fine weave, and length that makes it so valuable, a robe fit for royalty. Depictions of well-dressed Canaanites in Egyptian tomb paintings may give us a hint of what the coat looked like (see the end sheets of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary for illustrations of the Beni Hasan tomb paintings). Clearly, Jacob intends the coat to represent Joseph’s status and authority, as well as favor.

The robe indicates not only that Jacob favors Joseph over his other sons but that he ignores all they cherish about their place in family and society. The robe arouses the brothers’ suspicions that their father means to subvert tradition and pass the birthright blessing on to Joseph instead of to the firstborn, Reuben. Their father earlier tears his family apart by trying to reverse birth order and birthright. Now he is unintentionally doing it again with his own sons, thus destroying vital family relationships. Such favoritism wrongs Joseph. He becomes overconfident and exacting in nature, causing his brothers to hate him more.

II. “Behold, This Dreamer Cometh”

Joseph further angers his brothers by describing two of his
Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39)

The caravan holding Joseph captive passed the hills where Jacob’s tents stood. For a time the teenager “gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 213. However, Joseph, remembering Jacob’s stories about God’s love and constancy shown to Abraham, Isaac, and him, decided to trust the Lord and act as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. With Joseph’s descent into Egypt, divine Providence prepared the way for the deliverance of Jacob’s family and for the foreign domination that Abraham’s children were to experience until the sin of the Amorites in Canaan had reached its full measure (Gen. 15:13-16). It begins an incredible story of what the Lord can do through someone who, despite all odds, seeks to remain faithful to Him.

Considering the little that was revealed about Joseph before, not to mention the character of his family, what, if anything, was there from Joseph’s past that would indicate he would be so faithful to the Lord? What lessons can we learn from the answer?

Considering, too, the problems with lust shown by other family members (Gen. 35:22; 38:16, 18), not to mention the common practice of polygamy (which no doubt fed the lower passions), Joseph’s fortitude amid the constant badgering by the master’s wife is a powerful testimony to his faith and character.

Here’s Joseph, unjustly sold into slavery, then, unjustly, thrown into prison. Yet, three times Genesis 39 states that “the Lord was with” him. How are we to understand what that means? How could God be “with” him when so many bad things were happening to him?

One thing is clear: problems and trials are no indication that God has forsaken anyone. Joseph was unable to understand the providence of God; he couldn’t see then what we can see so clearly now. Of course, from his perspective none of this made sense; he was, nevertheless, determined to remain faithful anyway.

What lessons about trusting God, despite outward appearances, can you learn from this story?
dreams. In the first he and his brothers are in the fields binding sheaves of grain, bundles of stalks quickly tied together and then tossed on the ground. But Joseph’s bundle stands up while those made by his brothers gather around and bow down to it (vss. 5-7). Such dreams were a standard motif in the ancient Near East.

Joseph describes a second dream in which the sun, moon, and 11 stars bow to him (vs. 9). “What kind of dream is this that you have

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Genesis 40:8, 45:8, Proverbs 20:7, Jeremiah 23:32, Hebrews 11:22*

1. The behavior of Joseph’s brothers—and maybe of Joseph himself—seems to indicate that Jacob has not succeeded in teaching them the lessons that he has worked so hard to learn and that God had tried so hard to teach him. Was Jacob, in some sense, at fault for this? How much of a child’s behavior can be blamed on, or credited to, the parent(s)?

2. Joseph, as we first see him, seems to be a rather spoiled, boastful individual. Can we see anything in his character that would lead us to expect the exemplary behavior he displays in Egypt? What does this tell us about our capacity to judge other people’s ultimate character or worth?

3. Joseph’s true character emerges in extreme adversity. Could he have reached his full potential if his life had continued along its expected path, among his brothers, instead of in Egypt? Why, or why not? If not, what does this say about the role of trials and adversity in forming the Christian’s character?

4. Does Joseph attempt to use his skills in dream interpretation to obtain release from prison? Why, or why not? Is it natural and right to attempt to change our situation? Does this conflict with other biblical statements that seem to say we should rejoice in affliction? Explain.

5. What can we say about the place that dream interpretation occupies in this story? We have examples of other Old Testament figures (Daniel, most notably) receiving or interpreting prophetic dreams. The dreams that Joseph interprets mostly involve mundane matters. How would we react to someone today who claimed to have the ability to tell us about our personal destiny through our dreams? What counsel does the Bible give us?
The Cupbearer and the Baker (Genesis 40)

Both the baker and the cupbearer were high-ranking officials at Pharaoh’s court. (Compare Neh. 1:11.) They had themselves been thrown into jail (they may have been accused of plotting to overthrow Pharaoh) and had been placed under Joseph’s care.

**What** further light do verses 6-8 shed upon Joseph’s character and disposition?

_______________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________

Even here, in jail, Joseph not only sought to help others but witnessed for the Lord, as well (see vs. 8), giving God glory for the interpretation of the dreams.

**Despite** Joseph’s “success” in the prison and his faithfulness to God, what does Joseph say that shows just how keenly aware he is of the unjust treatment he has faced and how badly he wanted to get out of that jail?

_______________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________

Regardless of his faith, Joseph still sought human help in securing his own release. Again, not knowing the future, not knowing the Lord’s intentions, he did what he could to try to get out of his situation. This is certainly human and understandable. Unfortunately, as the chapter shows, it didn’t work. Once released, the chief butler forgot all about Joseph. Of course, in fairness to the chief butler, what could he have said: “Hey, Pharaoh, there’s a Hebrew in the dungeon who’s good at interpreting dreams; why don’t you let him out”? And as we’ll see in Genesis 41, he did eventually make mention of Joseph when the time was right. Until then, Joseph had to struggle with doubt and discouragement as he sat for two more years in that jail.

**No doubt** Joseph’s disappointment must have been bitter regarding his situation. How easily he could have given up all faith and hope. What do we do when we find ourselves, like Joseph, bitterly disappointed by events in our life? How can we maintain faith and hope amid such disappointments?
had?’” Jacob demands. “‘Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?’” (vs. 10, NRSV). His brothers’ jealousy only worsens. They react as though the dreams were fuel tossed into the furnace of their hatred. Their rage nearly erupts in murder. Instead, they sell Joseph for 20 pieces of silver. They tell their father that his son is dead, but the awful truth lies buried inside them and festers.

III. “Out of the Pit”

Terror seizes Joseph on the way to Egypt. But he resolves to give himself fully to God on the journey. In doing so, he goes from petted child to a self-possessed man of character. Faith in God enables him to withstand present and future hardships. Although he experienced betrayal and desertion by his own family, was sexually tempted, and then imprisoned for doing the right thing, Joseph makes the most of each situation and casts himself on God’s mercy. God exalts him, raising him from out of a sheep pit and into the palace of Pharaoh.

Witnessing

Perhaps your neighbor has just confided to you that she has been diagnosed with an incurable disease. Maybe your dad, just months away from retirement, is inconsolable after learning that his organization’s retirement plan is underfunded to the point of insolvency. What if you heard that the latest case of arson, in a string of unsolved cases, left a co-worker and family homeless and destitute? Is your response to those so deeply affected by these tragedies one of hope or hopelessness?

When tragedy strikes, encouragement—genuine optimism—is desperately needed to remind us that “Hardships may be a blessing. They were to Joseph. But the blessing is not in the hardship; it is in the way it is met and borne. Bear it impatiently, and with grumbling . . . , and the trial will be a curse, not a blessing. . . . The suffering that was designed to enrich . . . , borne impatiently, will impoverish.

“Bear in mind that God is never lacking in ways and means to turn our captivity into deliverance. We may see no way of escape from the hard conditions that oppress us, but God’s discernment is not thus limited. Because we see no way out we are prone to think such a way does not exist, that our state is hopeless. We should learn to lift our eyes from conditions that to us are quite impossible, and fix them upon our God, with whom nothing is impossible. Human help may not be able to reach us; He can always reach us.”—Carlyle B. Haynes, God Sent a Man (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1962), pp. 120, 121.

God can always reach us. What hope! What optimism! What infinite comfort is found in that statement. This is the response we should share with others whenever possible!
Joseph’s Release *(Gen. 41:1-40)*

This chapter introduces us to a typical Egyptian setting. We read of cows cooling off as they stand half submerged in the river. Reed grasses are mentioned *(Gen. 41:2, NIV)*. And Joseph shaves as he leaves prison (Semites are identifiable in Egyptian drawings because they wear beards). Because Egyptians regarded the Nile as the source of life, the portrayal of lean cows coming up from the river must have scared the Egyptians.

**How** does the chief butler finally come through for Joseph?

Notice also how Joseph, even after all these disappointments, still expressed his faith in the God of his fathers. This is seen in verse 16, where Joseph states so clearly that it was only through his God that he could interpret the dream. This is remarkable because, considering his circumstances, it would have been very easy for him to credit all this to himself in order to make himself look better before Pharaoh. Instead, we see again Joseph’s faith in action.

**After** Joseph interprets the dream, what does he say that, in another way, witnesses to his God?

For Joseph, all the events he predicted were the result of the action of God. In other words, He saw the hand of the Lord in all that would take place. Again, his words show that he trusted in the sovereignty and the power of God, which certainly helps explain why he was able to keep his faith even while in jail.

Notice, too, that after Joseph interpreted the dream, he started giving the king advice about what to do, which included setting someone up to take charge of storing grain. What in the dream, at least as recorded in Scripture, could have been interpreted in that manner? Nothing. Perhaps Joseph, sensing an opening that could get him out of jail, was angling for the spot himself. All things considered, why not? It would be the human thing to do, even for a human who loved God and was faithful to Him.
“An upright character is of greater worth than the gold of Ophir. Without it none can rise to an honorable eminence. . . . The formation of a noble character is the work of a lifetime and must be the result of diligent and persevering effort. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 223, emphasis supplied.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Share what it was like to take a trip to an interesting place or another country. What made that place different from where you live? The pictures in travel brochures of Egypt make it a place that would be intriguing to visit. Imagine what it was like for Joseph as he entered Egypt, a captive. We know the end of his story. At the time, Joseph did not know that things would turn out so well. God knows the whole story of our lives. How does Joseph’s experience help you trust in God’s presence and guidance to take you through your own personal Egypt?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Pampered and spoiled: This might be an apt description of Joseph’s early life. How does this contrast with being cast into a pit by his brothers who plotted his death? It seems that Joseph’s early life could not prepare him for his later trials. Through an invitation for God to draw close, how do even the weak survive appalling emotional trauma? How would a testimony of God’s presence during a difficult time in your life help and bless a friend who is facing a discouraging trial? Plan to share your good news with that person this week.

2. Sold at a slave auction, Joseph becomes the manager of Potiphar’s household. What lessons did he learn in childhood that helped him fulfill these duties? What prepared him for his confrontation with Potiphar’s wife? He was being seduced into a different type of slavery. How can we remain pure when tempted by what is immoral in our culture?

**Application Question:**

The cupbearer and the baker were given insights into their futures through the mercy of God, with Joseph as the mouthpiece. When the cupbearer was returned to his favorable position, he forgot about this amazing kindness. What kept Joseph from becoming despondent, even bitter? How would the story have ended if Joseph had given in to the adversary as he whispered doubt into his ears? Type out a list of God’s promises to post where you can read and memorize them. Plan to share your list with a co-worker or neighbor.
Further Study: “From the dungeon Joseph was exalted to be ruler over all the land of Egypt. It was a position of high honor, yet it was beset with difficulty and peril. One cannot stand upon a lofty height without danger. As the tempest leaves unharmed the lowly flower of the valley, while it uproots the stately tree upon the mountaintop, so those who have maintained their integrity in humble life may be dragged down to the pit by the temptations that assail worldly success and honor. But Joseph’s character bore the test alike of adversity and prosperity. The same fidelity to God was manifest when he stood in the palace of the Pharaohs as when in a prisoner’s cell. He was still a stranger in a heathen land, separated from his kindred, the worshipers of God; but he fully believed that the divine hand had directed his steps, and in constant reliance upon God he faithfully discharged the duties of his position.” —Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 222.

Discussion Questions:

1. In the lesson for this week, dreams and their interpretations played a big role in how God worked because in this part of the ancient world, in that culture, dreams were considered omens from the various gods. Does God today work through dreams and interpretations as He did back then? Or might He do so more in one culture today than in another, where dreams and interpretations aren’t taken as seriously? If the Joseph story were placed in a contemporary setting—say, in your own culture—how might the Lord have revealed Himself and His plans?

2. Let class members who are willing talk about some of their own personal “Joseph” stories, accounts of painful experiences that, viewed from later on, revealed the amazing providence of God.

3. Some people go through bitter experiences and come out stronger in faith; others have their faith destroyed. As a class, discuss the question: What makes the difference between the two outcomes?
The End of the Beginning

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 41:41–50:26.

Memory Text: “God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Genesis 45:7).

What is involved here is that in world history something else results from the actions of men than what they intend and achieve, something else than what they know or want. They accomplish their interest; but something else is accomplished which was implied in it, but which was not in the consciousness and the intention of the actors.”—G. W. F. Hegel, “The Philosophy of History”; in The Philosophy of Hegel (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), pp. 16, 17.

This week, as we come to the end of the beginning, we can see something of the principle stated above unfold. Despite the best, or the worst, of human intentions; despite what seems to be deceit, disappointment, sin, and disaster, “something else results from the actions of men than what they intend and achieve.” That “something,” of course, is the Lord working out His divine plan in human history.

Because most of us know the story and how it ends, the providence revealed in the pages of Genesis doesn’t take us by surprise. For those involved in the story itself, however, it took an incredible amount of faith to believe that God would work it all out as promised, especially in some dire circumstances. No wonder Hebrews 11 says “by faith Abraham,” “by faith Isaac,” “by faith Sarah,” “by faith Jacob.” This was a faith that trusted in what was not fully seen or completely understood, a faith that had to lean only on the promise of God and nothing else.

Sound familiar?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 30.*
Providence Unfolds  (Gen. 41:41–42:23)

Overnight Joseph went from being a slave in prison to the second-highest leader in Egypt. Now, though, a whole new set of challenges would await him.

Read  Genesis 41:45. What great new potential challenge did this pose to Joseph’s faith and fidelity to God?  See also 1 Kings 11:1.

Genesis 41:50-52 reveal Joseph settling into his new existence. The names Joseph gave his two sons reflect his own experience. The name Manasseh is related to the Hebrew verb “make to forget” and reflects the thought that his firstborn boy helped his father to forget the cruel past. Ephraim, the second son’s name, seems to mean “twice fruitful” and represented Joseph’s joyous feelings and the opening of a new chapter in his life.

As we read the rest of Genesis 41 and the first 17 verses of Genesis 42, we can see the providence of God unfolding. We see the steps leading to the fulfillment of Jacob’s dreams way back in Genesis 37. The dreamer’s dreams (Gen. 37:19) were soon coming to fruition in a manner that only the sovereign Lord could have arranged. This story is an amazing testimony to the power of God to fulfill what He says He will do in ways that far transcend our human understanding. The famine driving his brothers into his hands was, clearly, the Lord working out His will.

What  words do the brothers speak among themselves that show the guilt they harbored even after all these years?  Gen. 42:21-23.

The great suffering of their father over the loss of Joseph constantly brought before these brothers the gravity of their sin. Even worse was the fact that they couldn’t tell their father the truth, that Joseph wasn’t even dead. Little did they realize the grief that they would bring upon themselves and their family by their actions.

If you are making any major decisions soon, take the time to weigh all the possible consequences. Why is it so important to make sure any decision you make doesn’t violate any principles that God has revealed in His Word?
Key Text: Genesis 41:56, 57; 42:5

Teachers Aims:
1. To assess Joseph’s new position as a ruler in Egypt.
2. To compare Joseph’s dreams to their fulfillment in the testing of his brothers.
3. To grasp the magnitude of Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers and of his reunion with his father.

Lesson Outline:
I. A New Beginning (Gen. 41:37-40, 50-54, 57)
   A. Pharaoh gives Joseph an Egyptian bride, Asenath, and they have two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.
   B. Joseph builds storehouses in Egypt and gathers grain during the seven plentiful years.
   C. Just as in Pharaoh’s dream, a famine spreads over all lands.

II. A Dream Fulfilled (Gen. 42:5-9)
   A. When Jacob’s sons go to Egypt to buy food, Joseph recognizes them, but they do not know him.
   B. His brothers bow to Joseph, unwittingly fulfilling the prophetic dreams God gave him long ago.
   C. Joseph appears to deal harshly with his brothers, testing them to see if their hearts have changed.

III. A Family Reunited (Gen. 45:1-11)
   A. Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, who react in sorrow and fear for their betrayal.
   B. Joseph is overcome with compassion for his brothers and hastens to reassure them.
   C. Jacob and his sons move their families and all of their possessions to the land of Egypt.

Summary: God blesses Joseph in the land of Egypt, and many people are saved from the famine, including the house of his father, Jacob. Joseph is reunited with his father and brothers, knowing that it was God’s will, not his brothers’ treachery, that sent him to Egypt (vs. 8).

Commentary
Scripture presents Jacob’s family as an extremely dysfunctional one. His sons need to acknowledge their guilt by accepting responsibility for what they have done to Joseph and to their father before they can see any need for forgiveness. True, Jacob’s preferential treatment of Joseph provokes them. But the brothers still freely choose how they will react. Obviously, God could not build a shattered family into a nation that represented Him without first restoring its devastated relationships. But to be healed we first must
Joseph and His Brothers (Genesis 42, 43)

Joseph’s ploy with his brothers showed that he was trying to teach them a lesson, as well as learn more about his own family.

**Notice** the reaction of the brothers at finding the money in their sacks (Gen. 42:24-28). What does it signify about their faith and understanding of God?

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**Read** verses 36-38. What does this tell us about the character of Reuben?

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“During the years since Joseph had been separated from his brothers, these sons of Jacob had changed in character. Envious, turbulent, deceptive, cruel, and revengeful they had been; but now, when tested by adversity, they were shown to be unselfish, true to one another, devoted to their father, and, themselves middle-aged men, subject to his authority.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 225.

Jacob’s response to Reuben’s offer helped reveal the pain he had suffered at the loss of Joseph. Only when the famine got so severe that he had no choice (Gen. 43:8) did he agree to let his youngest son go back with them.

**What** was Joseph’s purpose in making the feast in Genesis 43:31-34?

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Much to their astonishment, Joseph sat his brothers down in the order of their birth, giving the youngest, Benjamin, the most food. He did this in order to “ascertain if the youngest brother was regarded with the envy and hatred that had been manifested toward him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 228. The fact that they ate and drank and were merry with him (Gen. 43:34) showed Joseph that they, indeed, had changed.

No doubt a great deal of suffering changed those brothers from what they once were to what they had become. How has suffering worked in your own life? What changes has it wrought in you? How can God use suffering to bring about something positive in someone?
recognize that we are diseased. God uses famine as a catalyst and Egypt as the setting to stage a miracle of restoration, comforting us with the hope that He can bring healing out of our hardships, no matter where life leads us.

**Forgiving and Being Forgiven**

Jacob’s sons first go down to Egypt to find food to survive the widespread famine. As they travel back and forth between the land of the Nile and Canaan, the Holy Spirit works on their hearts to accept the reality of what they have done to the brother they now believe to be long dead.

When they appear before Joseph, he puts them through a series of tests to see whether they are still the same men who almost killed him before selling him into slavery. First, he accuses them of being spies (Gen. 42:9). The people of the surrounding nations constantly tried to infiltrate the fertile Nile delta and river valley. The Egyptians ringed the edge of the desert with fortresses, but that could not prevent spies from entering the land. Such a charge, if believed, holds dire consequences and alarms the brothers.

Protesting their innocence, they reply that they are honest men, belonging to a family of 12 brothers, one still at home and one dead (vs. 13). Why would they mention such a detail of no concern to a foreign official? Do we see in their words the whispering of the Holy Spirit in the heart? Are their consciences being stirred? Although we may come to feel and recognize our guilt, as fallen human beings we cannot accept responsibility for our sinful actions and thoughts without God’s help. Only He can transform us, just as He enables the brothers to admit to one another, “‘Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother’” (vs. 21, NRSV). They admit this in their own language, not knowing that Joseph hears and understands every word. At last they feel Joseph’s bitter “‘anguish when he pleaded with us.’”

As Joseph listens to them struggle to make sense of their frightening situation, he desperately must want to believe what he witnesses. But have his brothers truly changed? Or is their remorse a temporary thing, brought on only by their present calamity?

Joseph, too, needs healing and assurance. God needs to remove from his heart the pain of betrayal and abandonment. Surely part of Joseph must have longed to reveal his identity long before he does so. He must have fought the urge to rush to his aged father. Perhaps the fear that he would never see Jacob alive after all sweeps through him like panic. And the agony must have increased when the brothers bring Benjamin back with them. But another part of him needs to be absolutely sure that the changes he marks in his brothers truly are real. He even may be afraid that it is all a hoax. So, he keeps testing them until he is convinced that their hearts are changed.

Forgiveness is the key to all their healing. But forgiveness may
Family Reunion (Genesis 44–47)

Joseph still wasn’t done. The final test came (Genesis 44). Judah’s confession and willingness to give himself instead of his brother, all for the good of his father, proved to him that his brothers were new men. It was only then that Joseph revealed his identity.

Read the words of Joseph to his brothers (Gen. 45:1-13). What does he say to show that his faith had, even after all these years, remained intact?

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Joseph’s faith in God during the dark years was now especially rewarded. What he couldn’t see before suddenly became clear to him. God had worked it out in ways that he couldn’t have imagined. There’s a good lesson here for all of us. If we seek to stay faithful, regardless of our circumstances, God will work things out in the end, even if it’s at the very end (Rev. 21:1).

The rest of Genesis 45 deals with the preparations to get the whole family together once again; in Genesis 46, Jacob, on hearing about Joseph, begins the long journey to Egypt. On the way he stops at Beersheba, where his grandfather Abraham had worshiped and his father had erected an altar subsequent to a divine repetition of the covenant blessings (Gen. 21:33, 26:23-25). As Jacob sacrifices and renews his covenant commitment to the God of his father, Isaac, the Lord reassures him of the covenant promises made at Bethel, with the added detail that Jacob’s family would grow into nationhood in Egypt (Gen. 46:1-4).

After Jacob and his family reached Egypt, a glad reunion took place (vss. 29, 30). Why did Joseph want his family to tell the Egyptians that they were shepherds, an occupation loathsome to Egyptians? (vss. 31–34).

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Though the text doesn’t say explicitly, Joseph must have known the corrupting influence of Egypt. This way, by keeping them separated from the Egyptians, he sought to protect the spiritual integrity of his extended family. Obviously, Joseph knew something of their special calling. No doubt, the incredible unfolding of events that brought him and his family together again only affirmed for him the reality of that calling.
TEACHERS COMMENTS

take time both to receive and to give. Joseph spends months making sure that the transformation he sees in his brothers, indeed, is real. Then, when Judah not only pleads for the release of Benjamin but shows compassion for Jacob their father (Gen. 44:18-34), Joseph is convinced. He now tells his brothers, to their utter amazement and fear, that he is the brother they thought dead but who is alive.

His brothers have gone through much. The Holy Spirit worked

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Genesis 41:46-57, 44:32, 45:3, 50:24, Romans 12:2

1. At this stage in human history, we have the benefit of hindsight in looking at the events of Genesis. To the participants, however, their path must have been very unclear, at times, especially when they were thrown into unexpected circumstances or asked to do something that went against human reason. Imagine any one of the events of Genesis—for example, God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Do you think your faith in God’s goodness would have been sufficient for you to make the right decisions—decisions that might have seemed wrong or perverse at the time? Most important, how may we obtain the kind of faith that Abraham had?

2. In a short time, Joseph goes from being at the bottom of Egyptian society to very near the top. What challenges do you think Joseph faced in becoming a leader of a society that adhered to values very different from his own? How do you think he met them? Since we, as Christians, are in some sense alien to this world, is there any lesson for us here? Explain.

3. Joseph’s brothers, like many biblical figures, do things much worse, by human standards, than anything most of us ever have done or probably will do. This very easily could have cut them off from God’s grace; yet, it didn’t. How does God work in their lives after the incident with Joseph?

4. Why does Joseph not reveal his identity to his brothers at first? What emotions might his brothers most likely have experienced when Joseph finally reveals his true identity? What are Joseph’s motives for making things so difficult for them?

5. On his deathbed, Jacob makes predictions about the destinies of his descendants. Examine them in the light of what comes later. Are these predictions fulfilled? If so, how? What does this tell us about God, His plans for our lives, and our roles in making His plans ours?
The Patriarchal Blessings  (Gen. 47:28–49:28)

After spending 17 happy years in Egypt surrounded by those dearest to him, Jacob felt death approaching. He called his sons to him for a last farewell.

Go back over the promises given to Jacob by God over the years (Gen. 28:12-15, 35:9-15, 46:2-4). Given the conditions and circumstances that surrounded him now, why should it have been easy for him to believe that the Lord would fulfill His promises? See also Gen. 46:26, 47:27.

As with Joseph, Jacob probably for the first time was able to see, from a human perspective, how God had been able to work out all that He promised. No doubt this reality gave the old man solace in his old age.

Before his death Jacob, through divine inspiration, revealed the future of his descendants (Genesis 49). The power of God constrained him to declare the truth, however painful to himself. Jacob withdrew the rights of the firstborn from Reuben and uttered a curse for the crime of Levi and Simeon. The later history of Levi’s family illustrates how a curse can be turned into a blessing.

God’s Word ever reveals both the virtues and vices, the failures and successes, of humans. The pages of Scripture are realistic and conceal neither the faults of its most revered and admired heroes nor their victories attained through the power of God. God’s men and women are depicted as “subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17; see also Acts 14:15).

Jacob revealed the corporate destiny of each tribal line. Yet, each line was composed of individuals with free will and free choice, especially in regard to their relationship with God, just as each of us experiences free will, as well. Whatever predictions God makes about nations and their future aren’t the same as predestinating individuals to either salvation or damnation. God’s foreknowledge of our choice isn’t the same as predetermining those choices.

“Character,” it has been said, “is destiny.” How do you understand that idea? How does your own character influence decisions you make? What character changes would you like to see in your own life?
mightily in them. But the story of Joseph reminds us that the damage caused by sin does not vanish instantly. Joseph forgives his brothers. But even forgiveness is hard for them to accept and believe.

After their father dies, doubts begin to trouble them. Would Joseph now seek a long-delayed vengeance (Gen. 50:15)? Apparently, before his death, Jacob also worries about what would happen to his sons after he is gone. He instructs his older sons to ask Joseph for forgiveness for what they had done (vs. 17). Interestingly, the father calls the brothers servants of his God (vs. 17). One could not imagine him describing them that way in years past. The transformation is genuine, but the crime left such deep scars on their souls that even after 17 years of peacefully sojourning with Joseph in Egypt they still need reassurance of his intentions toward them.

Witnessing

Family reunion. To some, the phrase ignites the best of memories, those filled with the happiest of times. To others, the very thought of a family reunion ignites passions best left buried—family arguments, painful face-to-face confrontations, stress-filled moments. Yet, in the end, almost everyone would agree that these times of family togetherness, good or bad, reveal the foundation, the core, of the family. If the heart of the family is basically sound, gathering together strengthens and knits tighter the unit. If, however, the core is weak and decayed, this is also painfully revealed.

Throughout our lessons this quarter we have focused on God’s earliest families. We have been far-removed observers at their family reunions. We have carefully followed their lifestyles in order to avoid their same mistakes. Likewise, we have committed to following in their footsteps when their acts show godly behavior. We have cringed when they openly rejected God and invited Satan into their hearts. And we have rejoiced with them when they have triumphed over adversity. Their journeys through time could so easily be our own!

The very fact there is a family history to trace at all is a miracle in itself. Only a miracle, direct from the mouth and hand of God, makes it possible.

The book of “Genesis began with a miracle, the miracle of Creation. And just as it took a miracle to create this world, it will take a miracle to save it . . . [it will take] the miracle of Jesus crucified, resurrected, and coming again.”—Arthur Ferch, “Beginnings and Belongings,” Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, Fourth Quarter, 2006, p. 109.

Now is the time to believe with all your heart in miracles! Now is the time to act on your beliefs and witness to others in every possible way, at every possible opportunity, so that they may have the same opportunity to believe and to join the family of God!
The End of the Beginning *(Gen. 49:29–50:26)*

Genesis 50 is, in a sense, the end of the beginning. The book went from Creation to the Fall to the Flood to the covenant promises made to Abraham and to his seed. However difficult it was, at times, to see how these promises ever could be fulfilled, by the time the book ends we can see the groundwork set for everything that God had promised: the children of Abraham as a great nation living as “a stranger in a land that is not theirs” *(Gen. 15:13)*, a people who will one day be called out of Egypt in order that “all the nations of the earth [shall] be blessed” in them *(Gen. 22:18)*.

**Read** Genesis 50. What very human reaction do we see in Joseph’s brothers?

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Their plea for forgiveness was, of course, unnecessary. Joseph had, obviously, forgiven them a long time ago. Now, finally, they could see just how genuine that forgiveness was. We see here, again, another example of the character and integrity of Joseph. In this way he functions as a “type” of Christ, forgiving them for what many would deem unforgivable.

**Read** carefully Joseph’s response to his brothers *(vss. 19, 20)*. How, in that response, do we see what is, in many ways, a key theme not only of Genesis but of the whole Bible? What great principle is expressed here? What hope should we draw from it?

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However difficult it often is for us to see it from our perspective (just as it was difficult for Abraham on Moriah or Joseph in the dungeon), God is working out His plans to bring out “good” and to “save much people alive” *(vs. 20)*. Whoever we are, whatever our circumstances, we must remember that the same God revealed in Genesis is the same God revealed in Revelation, a book unfolding in our times and telling our story *(Rev. 12:17)* as Genesis did the patriarchs.

Finally, Genesis began with a miracle, the miracle of Creation. And just as it took a miracle to create this world, it will take a miracle to save it. We’ve seen that miracle alluded to, first in Genesis 3:15 then in Genesis 22—the miracle of Jesus crucified, resurrected, and coming again.
The story of Joseph begins with him as part of a broken and estranged family. He had been a young man with a sense of duty who needed to grow up in the grace of Christ. His older brothers had been violent and deceitful. But Genesis 50:17 and 18 tell us that the Spirit had healed them to the point that all the brothers could weep together. What hope this gives to all those who suffer from broken homes or marriages or who like Joseph and his brothers have been victimized by dysfunctional-family dynamics. In faith we may cling to the promise of the Lord that “unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (Mal. 4:2).

Icebreaker: Imagine the last family reunion you attended. Make a mental list of who was there and how they had changed since the previous time that you saw them. In the story of Joseph’s reunion with his brothers, we find him comparing what he knew of them before with what he saw before his eyes. How had repentance and God’s intervention in their lives affected them? In what ways has God changed your life to His glory and to others’ good?

Thought Questions:
1. In the Bible, we are able to read the narratives of many lives. Some honor God despite failure; others end depressingly. If you could hold your story in its entirety in a document, how do you think the ending would read? Imagine yourself with two marking pens, a yellow one to emphasize the good choices and a red one, the mistakes. How much of your biography would be yellow? When your story includes Jesus’ guidance, how is the balance between yellow and red affected? Spend some time with Jesus in prayer asking Him to help you to allow the Holy Spirit to guide your choices.

2. At the last funeral you attended, whom were you grieving? What impact did his or her life have on yours? As Jacob approached his death, he gave a blessing to each of his sons as a living legacy. How were their life choices reflected in the blessing they received? What changes does God need to make in your life?

Application Question:
Joseph was given an amazing ability; he was able to interpret Pharaoh’s prophetic dreams. If someone were granted this ability today, what would happen to him or her? Would the person become famous? How would we know that he or she should not be committed to a psychiatric unit instead? Read Genesis 41. What clues can we find on how God led Joseph to remain faithful to Him? As a group, pray that God will bless each one individually and your church corporately to be courageous disciples for the gospel.

“Jacob had sinned, and had deeply suffered. Many years of toil, care, and sorrow had been his since the day when his great sin caused him to flee from his father’s tents. A homeless fugitive, separated from his mother, whom he never saw again; laboring seven years for her whom he loved, only to be basely cheated; toiling twenty years in the service of a covetous and grasping kinsman; seeing his wealth increasing, and sons rising around him, but finding little joy in the contentious and divided household; distressed by his daughter’s shame, by her brothers’ revenge, by the death of Rachel, by the unnatural crime of Reuben, by Judah’s sin, by the cruel deception and malice practiced toward Joseph—how long and dark is the catalogue of evils spread out to view! Again and again he had reaped the fruit of that first wrong deed. Over and over he saw repeated among his sons the sins of which he himself had been guilty. But bitter as had been the discipline, it had accomplished its work. The chastening, though grievous, had yielded ‘the peaceable fruit of righteousness,’ Hebrews 12:11.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 237.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, discuss this question: If there is one major theme that you could pull from the book of Genesis that can apply to our lives today, what would that be?

2. Much of the suffering we’ve seen here was brought upon people by their own actions, just as much of the suffering we see today is, as well. Does that make any difference in regard to how we should treat those people and seek to help them? Justify your answer.

3. Ask class members to choose a story from Genesis that meant the most to them in terms of giving them some practical truth that helped them deal with whatever personal situations they were facing.