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

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

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

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

This quarter we’re going to look at married couples in the Old Testament, not so much as a study on the principles of marriage but
rather to use married couples (though in many cases the marriages were composed of more than “couples”) as a starting point to learn various lessons—about faith, works, obedience, hope, trust, love, and a host of other aspects of what it means to be a follower of the Lord in a fallen world.

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

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

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

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

Get Motivated to Explore, Practice, and Apply

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, practice, and apply. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Practice); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in the “I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Practice: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Apply: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 1:26, 2:18–3:16.

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

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

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

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

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

SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Lesson 1** *June 30–July 6

Adam and Eve: The Intended Ideal
The Image of God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Key Text:** *Genesis 2:24*

**Teach the Class to:**

- **Know:** Marriage reflects God’s divine image.
- **Feel:** A desire to be created anew in God’s image.
- **Do:** Determine to ask Jesus to bless your relationships.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. In His Image** *(Gen. 1:27)*

- **A** Dust. Not stardust nor the ephemeral powder on moths’ wings but dust we walk on. God makes man from this dust and woman from a bone taken from man and stamps both with the Divine image. How does this union of our humanity with divinity reflect what marriage should be?

- **B** God brings the animals in pairs to Adam to name. Adam alone has no partner. God could have spared Adam this feeling of aloneness by forming Eve at the same time He forms Adam. Why do you think He chooses not to?

- **C** Adam awakes from a deep sleep. Perhaps he senses a hollowness where God removed a rib, feeling his incompleteness even more keenly. Imagine his wonder as he first beholds Eve, the emptiness vanishing. Why would God permit Adam to feel this emptiness, only to fill it?

**II. Two Are Better Than One** *(Gen. 3:1–3, 16–19)*

- **A** Why does separation from her husband endanger Eve? How does separation from God endanger us?

- **B** How does the inflowing of the Holy Spirit re-create the image of God in us?

**III. Sacred Love** *(1 Pet. 3:1–7)*

- **A** What does Peter consider to be a wife’s true beauty? How can we as a church emulate this?

- **B** Jesus laid down His life for the church out of love. What does this teach husbands about loving their wives?

**Summary:** Godly marriage reflects the image of God in its unity.
A Suitable Helper

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: The lessons this quarter focus on the importance of the relationship between a husband and wife as it impacts God’s purpose in our lives. The focus zeroes in on the ups and downs in the lives of selected couples in the Bible. As you begin the series with Adam and Eve, motivate your class members to study how the most ideal situation can turn into a sad one, and what should be done to prevent that possibility.

As he came out of the Creator’s hands, Adam surveyed all God’s creation, particularly the animal world, and saw an anomaly. All the creatures were two of a kind—male and female—and the distinction seemed to suggest a unique relationship between the two: intimacy, friendship, togetherness, and the possibility of extending the creative process. Was Adam sad that he seemed deprived of this uniqueness?

“It is not good that man should be alone,” says God (Gen. 2:18), and then provides Eve as Adam’s companion. Discuss this passage with the class: Was Eve an afterthought? Or was Eve the completion of humanity? How we answer this question depends on our attitude toward the role of husband and wife in marriage.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: Adam and Eve provide us significant clues on what makes or breaks the ideal marriage relationship. Lead class members to appreciate God’s provision for a happy marriage and let them share their personal experiences.

Bible Commentary

Adam and Eve, as the first couple in human history, teach us three unique principles about the successful marriage relationship: its divine origin, its unity in diversity, and its sanctity with solidarity.

I. Marriage: Its Divine Origin

The uniqueness of human creation. All creation—animate and inanimate,
Husband and Wife

In Genesis 2:23 Adam’s initial feeling upon seeing Eve was not romance but relief. In Hebrew his first word can be translated variously as “now,” or “this time,” but the translation that fits best is “At last!” Now, at last here was a living being with whom he could truly identify. She was not just his counterpart; being made from his rib, she was a literal part of him. Matthew Henry said that the woman was “not made out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

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

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

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

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

If you are married, what things can you do, what attitudes do you need to change, in order to be more closely united with your spouse? If you’re not married, what changes do you need to make in order to have better and closer relationships with the people around you?
human and nonhuman—owes its origin and existence to God (Genesis 1, Acts 17:24). But the creation of humans reveals a certain distinctiveness: a movement from “God said, let there be . . .” to “God said, let us make . . .” The process of creating humans shows an intimate divine touch, a divine exclusiveness, a divine sharing of Himself, so that human dignity and uniqueness are to be found in God’s sovereignty and grace. In Him and through Him, in Creation and in Redemption, we find our uniqueness.

**Consider Genesis 1:26.** What does the phrase “image of God” mean to you? Does it have physical, emotional, creative, male-female overtones? If so, how?

Adam and Eve were brought together by God’s will and action (Gen. 2:18, 22). The divine thought (“It is not good that man should be alone”) that preceded the creation of Eve and making the two the first marriage partners shows the sacredness and divine origin of marriage. Man and woman in marriage are equal partners in a sacred institution, established not only for their fellowship but also for making the home a place where God and His creative act will be recognized and celebrated. “God ordained that woman should be united with man in holy wedlock, to raise up families that would be crowned with honor who would be symbols of the family in heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 202.

**Discuss:** Creation, the Sabbath, and marriage all had their origin in the mind of God before sin entered into this world. How is this significant to you?

**II. Marriage: Unity in Diversity**

“The image of God . . . male and female” (Gen. 1:26, 27). These two phrases that describe the human creation and the human family teach us a profound truth. Just as unity, love, and unselfishness mark the Godhead, in the midst of Their plurality—the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—so should humanity, particularly the family, reflect that aspect of the image of God in being united in love. An ideal marriage brings together two to make one—not sacrificing the individuality of either, but each complementing the other, to ensure that the two “shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).
Two Are Better Than One

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

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

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

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

Prov. 11:14
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Eccles. 4:9–11
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

James 5:16
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

How have you experienced the help, protection, and good advice of others? How willing are you to get, or even to give, help when needed? Bring to class an example of when the presence and/or help of others made a big difference for you.
Discuss: The two shall be one, says God in solemnizing the first marriage. Before monogamy became part of sociology and law, it began as part of theology.

Unity makes a demand: “leave . . . cleave” (Gen. 2:24). God’s command that “therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” projects a fundamental principle for a happy marriage. Nothing—not even the love of parents—shall come in between husband and wife, and they shall stick to each other in prosperity and adversity, in joys and concerns, in health and sickness. The glue that cements husband and wife in a Christian marriage is made in heaven: love that is unselfish, sacrificial, and caring.

Discuss: Paul uses the Christ-church relationship to teach an important truth about the husband-and-wife relationship (Eph. 5:21–28). What does this analogy teach about sacrificial and unselfish love?

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: Take a few moments to let your class members think of practicing the principles learned in this lesson.

Thought Questions:

1 Why did God make Eve out of a rib from Adam, not from the head or from the foot?

2 Ellen G. White says, “The angels had cautioned Eve to beware of separating herself from her husband while occupied in their daily labor in the garden; with him she would be in less danger from temptation than if she were alone. But absorbed in her pleasing task, she unconsciously wandered from his side.”—Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 53, 54. The Fall followed. Do you think if Adam and Eve had been together, they would not have yielded to the temptation? Does unity of faith and spirit among couples provide spiritual strength?

Application Questions:

1 Paul says that Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it and commands husbands to manifest a similar attitude toward their wives (Eph. 5:25). The first part is true; how is the second possible? Have you
The Curse on the Relationship

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 The entry of sin in Eden brought enormous consequences—between humanity and God, among human beings, in the environment, and to the ideal concept of marriage and home. In view of this, how do we repair broken relationships in marriage?

**STEP 4—Apply!**

*Just for Teachers: As you study this lesson, allow your class members freedom to share how they can apply the principles found in this lesson to their daily living.*

Jesus endorsed the Genesis record and declared that the husband and wife are no longer two but one *(see Gen. 2:24, Matt. 19:6).* How will you apply this principle to solve a sharp argument between your spouse and you, such as, you want to have separate bank accounts, but your spouse wants a joint one with either of you able to draw on the account.

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

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Why is it that in homes, societies, and organizations it seems best to have one who is first among equals—a leader, for better functioning? What are the advantages of such an arrangement? At the same time, what are the dangers?

2. As a class, go over your responses to Wednesday’s lesson. What can you learn from each other? Also, how do you as a class help each other? Discuss how you could better use the advantages of a group to help individual members who are struggling with whatever issues they face.

3. Though these lessons are in the context of marriage, what principles can we take from what we’ve learned and apply to other relationships?

4. What does your church do to help women who are in abusive-home situations? What more could, and should, you do?

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

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Genesis 12:2; 16:1–5; chapter 22, James 2:20–26.

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

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

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 14.*
Human Solutions for God’s Promise

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Key Text:** Hebrews 11:11

**Teach the Class to:**
- **Know:** God can do through us what we can’t do alone.
- **Feel:** Trust God, claim His promises, and wait on Him.
- **Do:** Commit to having your faith made perfect by works.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. “She Is My Sister” (*Genesis 12:11–20; 15:1; chapter 20*)

   - **A** God says, “Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield.” Yet, Abram constructs his own defense, forged of a lie, to protect Sarai from Pharaoh. Why does this *shield* prove to be only base metal?
   - **B** White lies hold some truth. What do the results of Abraham’s white lie to Abimelech say about how God views the slightest deviation from truth?

II. The Other Woman (*Genesis 16, 18:11–14*)

   - **A** Ten years pass after God promises to make of Abraham a great nation. Sarah gives Hagar to her husband in an attempt to fulfill God’s promise her way. Tragedy results. What lesson is here for us who are tempted to lose faith in God’s promises because fulfillment seems overly delayed?
   - **B** Sarah’s womb was dead; likewise, every sinner is dead in sin. What other spiritual parallels can be drawn from Isaac’s miraculous birth that help us understand the miracle of the new birth in Christ?

III. Laying It All on the Altar (*Gen. 22:1–18*)

   - **A** Why does God command Abraham to perform human sacrifice? What is it that God really wanted Abraham to sacrifice? What does He want from us?
   - **B** Despite the terror that he must have felt at being a sacrifice, Isaac submits in perfect obedience to his father. What does this reveal about submitting to our heavenly Father, no matter the circumstances?

**Summary:** Abraham and Sarah work out God’s plan for them in their own wisdom and fail. It is only when they surrender everything to God that they gain through faith what they could not secure through their own efforts.
Telling Lies

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

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Abraham is a towering character in the Bible. Almost 10 percent of Genesis is devoted to his life. With him begins the concept of a call, a covenant, a chosenness that define God’s people. He is called the father of the faithful (see Rom. 4:11, Gal. 3:7) and the friend of God (see 2 Chron. 20:7, James 2:23). Sarah’s faith draws a special attention of its own (see Heb. 11:11). As you study the pilgrimage of this couple, motivate your class to understand God’s promise and purpose in the midst of life’s struggles.

Abraham is a great model—not because of any intricate greatness in himself but because of a recognition of, and obedience to, the voice of the true God in the midst of Ur’s glittering paganism. When he heard that voice, he believed in God, took his wife, and “went out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8, NKJV). Saving faith is not a matter of history or geography, philosophy or science, politics or economics. Neither is it blind or dumb or deaf. It is an abiding trust in a Person—the Person of God. He speaks; faith obeys. Abraham, from the start, grasped that link, and Sarah too (see Heb. 11:11)! Together they have left us the trail, the trial, and the triumph of faith.

Reflect: Have your class members read Hebrews 11:8–19, one verse each. Ask them to talk about what characteristics of the faith of Abraham and Sarah stand out as prominent.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: Abraham and Sarah must have had their own desires and strategies—but these were set aside in order that God’s goal in history may be fulfilled. Let your class members share what they appreciate most from these pioneers of faith.

Bible Commentary

Genesis records at least eight conversations God had with Abraham. Although only one of these directly involves Sarah, both husband and wife...
Laughing at God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Write a paragraph about what you believe is the most important lesson for us in this account of Abraham and Sarah. Bring your response to class on Sabbath.
are united in the pilgrimage of faith. Three parts of this pilgrimage deserve our attention: the call, the covenant, and the triumph.

I. Heeding the Call

God said, “Get thee out,” and Abraham took Sarah and left (see Gen. 12:1–5). Accomplished, respected, and blessed with wealth, Abraham was no penniless nomad. Wealth or poverty, eloquence or timidity, does not prepare one to come to God’s notice. God’s call is His sovereign act. He knows the end from the beginning. A shepherd in Tekoa, a prince of Egypt, a fisherman by Galilee, a Pharisee rushing to Damascus—it does not matter. God chooses. God calls. Whoever accepts the call must “get out” and “join in.”

Get out of what? Get out of your family, your community. Get out of self, and join the pilgrimage to the Promised Land. Abraham and Sarah were pioneers of that pilgrimage. Even though the destination was clouded in a mist, they knew the One who promised. They knew the reality of the promised city “whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). A true disciple puts on the pilgrim’s robes, picks up the telescope of faith, sees the reality at a distance, and walks steadily with no distraction of time or distance.

Discuss: God told Abraham, “Get thee out.” Jesus commanded His disciples, “Follow Me.” Both commands call for a “giving up” and a “taking on.” Are such commands practical and doable?

II. Becoming Covenant Children

The relationship of the covenant. Although the idea of covenant appears in the case of Adam (see Gen. 3:15) and Noah (see Gen. 9:12, 15, 16), the first formal expression of covenant as the basis of the God-human relationship is expressed in the case of Abraham—at least eight times (see Gen. 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–16; 15:1–6; 16:10; 17:1–7, 21; 22:17). Further, God established circumcision (see Gen. 17:9, 10) as a sign of the personal and intimate bond involved in the covenant. The apostle Paul universalizes this intimate relationship by redefining circumcision from an act of flesh to an act of a renewed heart (see Rom. 2:29; Gal. 6:15; Col. 2:11, 12).
Trouble Because of Unbelief

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What day-by-day things can you do to increase your trust in God and thus avoid the kind of disastrous decisions that unbelief can lead to?
The means of the covenant. Crucial to the covenant is the birth of an heir, but Abraham was childless. He considers whether his servant Eliezer should be adopted as his heir (see Gen. 15:1–3). No, says the Lord; the heir shall come from Abraham’s flesh. Sarah interprets Abraham’s flesh in biological terms. She wants to help out God—and therein is great danger—and seeks for the heir through Hagar. Ishmael is born (Genesis 16), but 13 years later, God says no again. The heir shall be born to Sarah (Gen. 17:6, 18:10). By now “Sarah had passed the age of childbearing” (Gen. 18:11), but God assures the aged couple, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14). Sarah, at 90, dead as far as childbearing is concerned, feels a divine disturbance within her. Withered tissues of her womb blossom and make way for the covenant child. Faith stood vindicated.

Discuss: Both Abraham and Sarah knew God had a future for them. Yet, twice (Genesis 12:10–20; chapter 20) they faltered and lied about their marital relationship, and twice they wanted to help God fulfill the covenant through Eliezer and Ishmael. What does this reveal about human nature and divine grace?

III. Faith’s Test and Triumph

“God tested Abraham” (Gen. 22:1). At the age of 120, Abraham faces one final test. God calls the patriarch to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. What kind of God is this? A sadist? A contradictory being who commands one thing and demands something else? One moment He forbids murder and at another He seeks it as a sacrifice? Or was Abraham going through old-age delusion? Such were the whispers Satan must have thundered into Abraham the night before the journey to Moriah. But genuine faith is made of sterner stuff. It does not question God’s character; that is Satan’s job, not the believer’s. Abraham places Isaac on the altar. The parents had not failed in their duty: to train Isaac to be a child of faith.

“Here I am” (Gen. 22:1, 7, 11). Three times Abraham responds hineni (“Here I am”)—when God was about to ask for Isaac’s sacrifice, when Isaac was about to query his father about the absence of the lamb, and when the angel was about to stop Abraham’s hand from slaying Isaac. Three times he responded with the same answer of readiness: to obey God’s call, to assure his son in the certainty of God’s ways, to celebrate God’s saving ways at life’s most critical times. Whatever the situation, faith never wavers.
Ultimate Demonstration of Faith

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

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

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

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

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

We’re not all called upon to make such great sacrifices for the Lord. But we do need to make them anyway. Look at how you’ve lived your life during the past year. What kind of choices have you made? Are they choices that reflect an attitude of surrender to God? If not, what changes must you make?
“God will provide for Himself” (Gen. 22:8). Isaac’s earnest and urgent query (“Here is the fire, here is the wood, but where is the lamb?”) gets a most appropriate reply. To a person of faith comes no test or trial without the assurance that God is able to meet every situation. That assurance originated in God’s throne room when the Father provided the sacrifice in the form of His Son dying on the cross. To accept that Son is the ultimate victory for every crisis one encounters. God always provides.

**Discuss:** “By faith Abraham . . . offered up Isaac” (Heb. 11:17). What kind of a faith is that—reasonable or presumptuous? Why do you agree with the apostle’s reasoning that God, who performed the biological miracle of Isaac’s birth, can perform a resurrection miracle?

**STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** As you go through the lesson, lead your class to discuss how they can practice the principles found in this lesson.

**Thought Question:**
“A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 144. If you practice this principle, what changes would you have to make in your home?

**Application Questions:**
Why do you think God called Abraham His friend (James 2:23)? Is it possible for you to be God’s friend? If so, how?

**STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** Abraham and Sarah found their strength by believing in God. Encourage your class members to share their faith struggles and experiences.

Marriage is a sacred relationship. But is it a relationship worth saving even if it costs one’s life? Evidently Abraham faltered, and Sarah went along with the conspiracy. Are there other ways in which a couple could conspire to betray the sanctity of marriage? What is the sole protection in such situations?

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

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

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

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final question. What can you learn from one another?

2. As a class, share your thoughts on the fact that despite their faults, mistakes, and lack of judgment, Abraham and Sarah are held up as examples of faith. What hope does that present that you could use to encourage those who feel, perhaps, that their failures are too much and that God has rejected them?

3. Have those who are willing talk about a time when they had to make a great sacrifice for God. What can you learn from their experiences?

4. The mistake with Hagar brought a great amount of grief to the family. How can you help any families you know now who are suffering because of mistakes made by the parents?

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

SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 21.
The Arrangement

Read Genesis 24 and then answer the following questions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Text: Genesis 28:3

Teach the Class to:
- Know: Parents need to be united in raising children.
- Feel: A desire to renew your dedication to God.
- Do: Resolve to always be truthful in your decisions.

Lesson Outline:

I. Femme Fatales and Beauty That Binds (Gen. 24:3, 4)
   A Lot’s wife. Hagar. Isaac need look no further than his own family to see how disastrous it is to marry outside one’s faith. He submits to his father’s wish to entrust a God-fearing servant to find him a bride. What does this teach us about seeking godly counsel in choosing our spouse?
   B Rebekah means “to fetter (by beauty).” This beauty draws water for Abraham’s servant and his camels and is a balm to Isaac’s bereaved heart, binding it in love. In what ways does Christ’s beauty bind us to Him and shine out to draw others to Him?

II. Jacob and Esau (Genesis 16, 18:11–14)
   A In Isaac’s day the cure for infertility was a concubine. Isaac goes to the Lord instead of another woman. How does this show the power of prayer?
   B Two brothers fought in Rebekah’s womb. Esau came out first in this life but sold the precious for the perishable. Jacob coveted the unseen realities of heaven. How can we train our hearts to covet what we can’t see?

III. Stealing the Blessing (Gen. 27:11–14)
   A Isaac’s blindness may have been caused by cataracts, milky membranes that cover the eye. But his failed eyesight is nothing compared to his inner blindness as far as his sons are concerned. His affection for his eldest son blinds him to God’s true design. What are the things that keep us from seeing God’s true will for us?
   B Jacob supplants his brother with a bowl of lentils. Christ offers something more priceless: His own blood, supplanting Satan as ruler of this world. Why must Christ supplant our old nature to make us joint heirs with Him?

Summary: “Marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be as it were the very beginning of love.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 106.
Jacob and Esau

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: The lesson this week focuses on what makes or breaks a family. As you study the characters of Isaac and Rebekah, Esau and Jacob, help class members to concentrate on the competing forces of spiritual maturity and spiritual vanity.

The covenant defined Abraham’s movements in life. As that life was drawing to a close, the old patriarch was driven to one final duty: to prepare Isaac as the inheritor of that covenant. That preparation involved his marriage. Abraham makes his servant promise that the bride shall not be from a pagan people, and that under no condition would he take Isaac to the land out of which God called Abraham. With life’s every movement so conditioned by faithfulness to God’s call, no wonder Abraham is called the father of the faithful.

Our lesson this week is on the immediate inheritor of the covenant, Isaac, his marriage, and his family. The couple did not necessarily build a model home, but God used them in spite of themselves to preserve and pass on the covenant. As the lesson moves, watch both maturity and immaturity play out an unpleasant drama; and yet, God’s mysterious purpose does get fulfilled.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: As you progress in the lesson, help your class members to focus on one issue: What can I learn from the complex and competing forces that mark the lives of Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob?

Bible Commentary

The story begins well because it is rooted in pleasing God and in preserving the covenant. Isaac’s marriage is viewed, not from a worldly perspective but from a divine purpose. But even good beginnings and noble purposes do not guarantee a healthy home and faithful children. The secret is always the same: “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Ps. 127:1, NKJV). With that in mind, let us raise two questions: What contributes to a happy marriage? What causes unhappy homes?

CONTINUED
The Birthright—Content and Context of the Contest

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

**What promises in the Abrahamic covenant were confirmed to Isaac?**

*Gen. 26:4.*

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

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

Name of the place *(20:1, 26:1)* ____________________________

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

Lying about *(20:2, 26:7)* ________________________________

Explanation for the lie *(20:11, 26:9)* ________________________

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

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

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

A marriage is not a haphazard event, something one enters hastily in the heat of emotion, without preparation and understanding. Preparation for Isaac’s marriage begins with Abraham’s assurance to his servant that God “will send His angel before” him to obtain a bride from his people (Gen. 24:7). A person of faith knows that life is not a series of accidents but a planned journey in which God plays the key role. The God who promised great things for Abraham’s life shall also plan the way. With that key role conceded, Isaac’s marriage shall come to pass. But that marriage must be from within Abraham’s people and not from the uncovenanted Canaanites. A marriage is too sacred to risk an alliance with someone who does not share the commitment of the same faith. To be happy, it must be said of a marriage: “The thing proceedeth from the Lord” (Gen. 24:50). “No one who fears God can without danger connect himself with one who fears Him not”— Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 174.

Discuss: Esau’s marriage brought “a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah” (Gen. 26:35, NKJV). Read the context and find out why.

Prayer. Constant prayer is the atmosphere in which Isaac’s marriage is accomplished. The search begins with Abraham’s prayer and plea for faithfulness to the covenant (Gen. 24:1–9). Eliezer’s mission is marked by three acts of prayer and worship (Gen. 24:12, 26, 52). Isaac comes out of his prayer to accept the bride (Gen. 24:63–67). When marriage, or for that matter, any act of life, from planning to fulfillment, is so filled with prayer, can there be any doubt that it will not be happy and successful? But what is this prayer? Is it just a religious routine? A compulsion of tradition? A counting of beads? Prayer in the Bible—from Abraham to Moses to David to Jesus to John—is an intentional, constant, seeking of God’s will and reaching out for His empowering to follow that will. Nothing is too small, no one is too busy, to come before the altar of prayer.

Love. The road to Isaac’s life partnership begins with four simple words: “And he loved her” (Gen. 24:67). The fountain of life and the wonder of love merge to advance God’s purpose in the lives of Isaac and Rebekah. The story is as simple as it is sweet, as romantic as it is reverent. The love of Isaac is undying, and we cannot assume anything
Stealing the Blessing

Read Genesis 27 and then answer the following questions:

1. Why did Jacob show some hesitancy in perpetrating this fraud on his father? What does that reason say about his character?

2. What were the material advantages that came with the blessing? How might that have explained each one’s desire for it?

3. What did Isaac do that showed he had his suspicions? What reasons might he have had for them?

4. What reasons did Rebekah have for instigating this deception?

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

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

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

contradictory in the response of Rebekah. Isaac never took another wife, and their monogamy endured because of their mutual devotion, affection, and respect.

Review: Rebekah was barren. “Isaac pleaded with the Lord . . . and the Lord granted his plea” (Gen. 25:21, NKJV). What can you learn from this about God, prayer, and love in the life of a couple?

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: Discuss with your class the following so as to bring out practical lessons helpful in day-to-day Christian living.

Thought Questions:
Why did Abraham and Isaac insist on a marriage among their own people? Is this any different from the Nazi doctrine of racial purity or the Hindu insistence on caste preservation?

Application Questions:
At Beersheba, after receiving the covenant from God, Isaac “built an altar . . . pitched his tent . . . and . . . dug a well” (Gen. 26:25, NKJV). An altar, a tent, a well—these are what Isaac considered as basic essentials to life. What does each one symbolize? How can you transfer the significance of each to your own life and home?

Witnessing
Think of ways in which your home can be a witness to God’s promises. How can we ensure that our homes reflect God’s purposes and love?

STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: Let the class reflect on the following, and note the lessons that are applicable to daily life.

CONTINUED
Wives and the Covenant

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

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

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

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

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

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

What promises of God are especially important to you? At the same time, ask yourself, How can I make the kind of choices that will allow these promises to be fulfilled in my life?
• Isaac comes through as a meditative, praying, soft person. He remains loyal and loving to one wife at a time when polygamy was common. Culture and common practices are not to dictate his ways and form his character. Jot down what lessons you can learn from this.

• Rebekah, at the well, is tender, simple, and a model of courtesy. But the later Rebekah is scheming, cunning, and plays favoritism. The change is a disturbing lesson in Christian character development. How can you guard against such a danger in your life?

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

Discussion Questions:

1. Think about all the strife and suffering that could have been avoided had Rebekah and Isaac made wiser choices. What principles did they violate, and what can we learn from their mistakes that could help protect our homes from unneeded suffering?

2. There’s a certain irony in the attitudes and actions of Rebekah. She was upset that Esau had married foreign women, because they could lead him away from the true God. And yet, she was the one who pushed Jacob into this horrible deception. What kind of inconsistency do we see there? In what ways can we be in danger of doing something similar? *See also* Matt. 23:23.

3. Is there someone you know who is facing an important decision? If so, what can you as a class do to give that person the best possible guidance? What can you do to help that person discern the will of God in making that choice?

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

SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 28.
Marrying Within the Faith

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Text: Ephesians 5:25

Teach the Class to:
- Know: In marriage we should be equally yoked.
- Feel: Favoritism leads to jealousy.
- Do: Learn from Jacob’s and Laban’s mistakes.

Lesson Outline:

I. Being Equally Yoked (Gen. 28:1–4)

- Esau takes not one, but two wives: Bashemath and Judith. The Bible says that they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah, provoking her to say “I am weary of my life.” Why is it important that we, like Jacob, choose our spouses from among those who love God?

- Jacob marries Rachel after seven years of labor. What responsibility do we have to be able to provide for a family before starting one?

II. Greed, Deceit, and Retaliation (Gen. 29:15–30)

Jacob wakes up married to the wrong wife. Laban offers him Rachel for another seven years of back-breaking work. No doubt Laban’s manipulation of the situation reminds Jacob of the advantage he once took of Esau. Why does God permit us to be dragged over the ground we’ve dragged others over?

III. Desperate Housewives (Gen. 29:30, 33:1–3)

- Ever hear of couples having a baby to save their marriage? Leah’s sons’ names betray her desperation. Of Reuben she says, “Therefore my husband will love me”; of Simeon, “Because the Lord hath heard I was hated”; of Levi, “Now this time will my husband be joined unto me.” But after Judah she says, “Now I will praise the Lord.” It takes giving birth four times to be born again herself! How does this show that in marriage first our affections must be upon the Lord?

- Rachel’s desperation to have a baby brings to mind Sarah. Suddenly, Bilhah finds herself promoted from Rachel’s maid to wife; Leah retaliates by giving her maid to Jacob. It is only when Rachel turns to God that He “hearkens unto her,” and she conceives. Why must we wait on God to fill our needs?

Summary: Christians are to make wise choices, be honest in their dealings, and not show favoritism to anyone.
Working and Waiting

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

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

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

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

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

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

Look again at Laban’s excuse. In what ways do we need to be careful of not doing the same thing; that is, using the excuse of customs or traditions (or anything, really) in order to justify unjust acts?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson again illustrates the sovereignty of God, something we should never forget as we walk the Christian way. If we believe God has a purpose for each of us, how do we know about it? What should we do?

Does God have a purpose for our lives? Think of God’s assurance to Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5, NKJV). Centuries earlier, God revealed to Rebekah that she was carrying twins in her womb, and that “the older shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23, NKJV)—a promise Paul refers to in discussing God’s purpose in history (see Rom. 9:12, 13). That God knows the end from the beginning and that His plans will be fulfilled (see Isa. 46:10) is a central message of the Bible. In view of this, God’s children are to wait patiently for His plans to be fulfilled. But here are examples of how saints often falter: Abraham and Sarah in seeking the fulfillment of the covenant through Hagar; Rebekah and Jacob in their own deceit. The end result of such distrust of God is only sadness and grief. Rebekah would never again see the son she loved, and Jacob’s own life “was weighed down with self-condemnation.” —Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 180.

Discuss: Why is patience as waiting upon the Lord an important characteristic of God’s people (Heb. 6:12, 12:1, James 5:11, Rev. 14:12)?

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: As you explore the lives of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah—their love, marriage, and complex relations within the family—focus on how God works to fulfill His purpose despite the failure of His chosen people.

Bible Commentary

The birthright, the blessings, the headship of the family, the inheritance of
Family Strife

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

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

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

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

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

Notice the words of Rachel to Jacob in Genesis 30:1 and the desperation that they reveal. When was the last time you were in a desperate situation that only God could solve? How did you react? What lessons did you learn that could help you if something similar were to happen again?
the covenant—all these did not provide the joy and the courage Jacob needed to lead a normal life. He flees from his father’s home; he is separated from his mother, whom he will never see again; he runs in fear of Esau; and he exchanges the security of his home for the uncertainty of an unknown future. But there is something about Jacob’s character that held the shattered pieces of life together: “His mind was ever reaching forward to the future, and seeking to grasp its unseen blessings.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 178.

In that reach to the future, Jacob knew that God was in control. We see this control, despite Jacob’s many follies, in the events between Bethel and Peniel.

I. Bethel: The House of God

A ladder to heaven. As he flees from the safety of his home, unfamiliar with the woes and pitfalls of the wilderness, Jacob finds himself in an utter predicament of fear. What would his future be? Will he awake to see the dawn without falling prey to the creatures of the night? Jacob needs to learn that his security lies elsewhere. God’s covenant promise is based, not on his cunningness or selfishness but on God’s own faithfulness. A deeply troubled sleep yields to a reassuring dream of a ladder ascending to heaven. A disturbed soul, fallen down, a prey to hopelessness, he needs to look up and claim the assurance, “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:2, NKJV), as Isaiah did (Isa. 50:7). God lets down a ladder whenever we turn away from self-scheming to trust Him who will fulfill His purposes.

Discuss: What do these promises mean to you? “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4, NKJV). “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear” (Isa. 59:1, NKJV).

“This is the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17, NKJV). Although the dream has its drama of angels ascending and descending from God, assuring Jacob that he is not completely cut off from communication with His Maker, the significant focus of the entire experience is God’s renewal of the covenant with Jacob—the covenant of the God of Abraham and
Jacob’s Leaving

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Even amid all this deceit, trickery, passion, jealousy, favoritism, and on and on, the Lord was there, working out His plan despite human foibles. At the same time, how much better this story could have been had people loved God first and one another as themselves. As you go about your daily business, in what ways can you consciously seek to live as God would have you live, thus avoiding much needless pain?
of Isaac. The continuity of the covenant, in spite of erratic human decisions, is the unbroken thread that runs through biblical history. Humans may fail, but God? Never!

“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it” (Gen. 28:16, NKJV). How much is this experience like that of any of us. It takes a sense of absolute lostness and helplessness to realize that God is here. God’s promise is ever unfaltering: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NKJV). Blessed is the person who recognizes it!

Discuss: “The ladder represents Jesus, the appointed medium of communication. . . . Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 184.

II. Jacob, Rachel, and Leah: Love and Turmoil

The upward reach or the outward beauty? At Bethel God gave a fourfold assurance to Jacob (Gen. 28:15: I am with you; I will keep you; I will bring you back; I will not leave you), and that should have been sufficient for Jacob to entrust his future in God’s hands. But he chooses to bargain with Laban to get Rachel and finds instead a match in deceit. Decisions based on the beauty of the outward at the expense of the inward, not taking into account God’s purpose and direction, often end up in grief and sorrow. The rush of youth, the love for the beautiful Rachel, and the darkness of tradition combine to produce the unexpected tragedy of another seven years of labor. Jacob finds himself married, not to his love but to Leah, and the path of deception with which Jacob left his home comes around to a full circle. The wages of deception are disappointment and grief.

Consider Leah, Rachel, their maids, and Jacob’s relations with them. Why cannot polygamy produce a happy home?

Discuss: Rachel was beautiful and romantic and held the heart of Jacob, but Leah felt slighted and longed for Jacob’s attention. Yet, God chose Leah to bear the lineage of the progenitor of Christ. Is there any lesson we can draw from this?
Playing Favorites

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of course, none of us should have to deal with the complications arising from polygamous marriages, but we all need to be careful in how we treat others. No doubt Leah and eventually the children she bore were all pained by Jacob’s actions. What can you do to be more careful in dealing with the feelings of others who are dependent upon your love and affection?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: Discuss with your class the following so as to bring out practical lessons helpful in day-to-day Christian living.

Thought Questions:
1. God had revealed to Rebekah even before the twins were born that the younger son shall be the heir to the covenant. So, what is wrong with Rebekah trying to prevent Isaac from passing on the blessings to Esau?

2. Ellen G. White says, “Rebekah and Jacob should have waited for God to bring about his own purposes, in his own way, and in his own time, instead of trying to bring about the foretold events by the aid of deception.”—Spiritual Gifts, vol. 3, p. 115. Can you cite instances in which you, too, may act that way?

Witnessing
How can a married life be a witness to God’s love and guidance?

STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: Let the class discuss the following, and note how each can have the experience of Bethel, as well as Peniel. Let members share some ups and downs in their lives.

In spite of his sin and deception, Jacob was chosen by God as the inheritor of His covenant with Abraham. What lessons can you gather from this that are applicable to your life?

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

Discussion Questions:

1. Talk about the question of being unequally yoked with unbelievers. How are we as Christians to act when we face this situation? What can we learn from one another’s experiences?

2. What advice would you give to someone who was thinking about marrying outside the faith?

3. We can learn a lot from the story this week about how not to act. What principles can we learn from what we’ve read that can help us better avoid the kind of mistakes that this family made?

4. Greed is a powerful passion within the human heart. What ways can we protect ourselves from being swept up by it?

5. If a couple in your class has been married a long time, have them explain what the keys are to a happy marriage. What are the principles? What must couples never do? What should they always do? How can we apply those principles (when applicable) to other areas of our lives?

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

SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 4.*
Chivalry at the Well

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Text: Hebrews 11:24–29

Teach the Class to:

Know: God has His people in all ethnic groups.
Feel: How Moses felt when harangued by his siblings.
Do: Rid themselves of all jealousy and prejudice.

Lesson Outline:

I. Moses (Exodus 2–4)

A Moses kills an Egyptian and hides the body in the sand. Even if no one had seen the act, the stench most likely would have given away the crime. What happens when we bury sin in our hearts instead of confessing it to God?

B Zipporah bears Moses a son whom he names Gershom, referring to his bitterness of exile. Yet, the Bible says that Moses was “content to dwell” with his new family. How does God provide for us the comfort of a family when we are torn from the one we have always known?

II. A Bloody Husband (Exod. 4:19–26)

On the way to Egypt, an angel of the Lord comes against Moses in a threatening manner for not circumcising his son. Not only does Zipporah save the life of her husband, her quick thinking in cutting off her son’s foreskin saves him from being cut off from his people. What does this say about the danger of neglecting to do the smaller things that God asks in the process of accomplishing the bigger task of His will?

III. Miriam, Aaron (Exod. 18:1–27, Num. 12:1–3)

A Jethro sees how overworked Moses is when he visits the wilderness encampment. What advice does he give his son-in-law, and what does this teach us about not taking too much burden on ourselves at the expense of our health and other duties?

B Aaron and Miriam resent Zipporah’s influence over Moses and criticize “that Ethiopian woman” to their brother. When does legitimate concern of family members spawn into outright interference, and how should spouses react to it?

Summary: Zipporah’s story sounds like something right out of a fairy tale: She is rescued from local thugs by a foreign prince and later marries him. But his tender regard doesn’t end with the honeymoon. He leaves her with her father so that she won’t have to witness the terror of the plagues. And when the Israelites murmur against Moses, she looks for ways to relieve his burdens. Just as Aaron and Hur hold Moses’ arms up during battle, Zipporah and Moses strengthen each other in times of need.
Moses and His Father-in-Law

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: A happy and lasting marriage is built on love, understanding, and support—not just between the couple but among the family members involved. Encourage your class members to freely discuss how this mutual respect and relationship between various members in a family can be developed.

With a beaming smile, Karen handed me the card. “In just over a month, I’ll be married. Just imagine—in another four weeks.” I looked over the card, then looked at her excited face. She seemed a picture of perfect happiness. I wished her well and promised to be at the wedding. Then in passing, I remarked, “I have been married for forty-four years, and it seems like forty-four days.”

“Forty-four years! To the same person? I can’t believe it,” she said.

“You can make it, too,” I assured her, “if mutual and unconditional love governs your marriage with Ron.”

“If it’s only Ron, I have much hope. But both of us have big families, and I hope they don’t cause us trouble.”

Karen touched a raw nerve in a marriage relationship. When you marry, you marry not just one person but his or her family, as well. Although the Bible says that in marriage “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24, NKJV), it also commands, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Exod. 20:12, NKJV). Are these two commands contradictory?

For sure we know that God does not contradict Himself. So, what should Karen and Ron do as they contemplate their married life and the respect and care they need to show their parents? This week’s study provides some lessons as it deals with relationships between Moses and Zipporah, Moses and his father-in-law, and Zipporah and her in-laws.

Have the class members browse through 1 Corinthians 13 and invite them to share some principles that are essential for the survival of love in the complex relationships a marriage involves.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: As you study the family of Moses, note how faith in God and love for one’s family assures a smooth home life.
Zipporah and Her Husband’s Religion

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

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

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

**By** answering the following questions, attempt to see the matter from God’s point of view:
(1) Did Moses know that Israelite male children were to be circumcised? (2) Did Moses know about the significance of circumcision? (3) How might the Israelites respond if they knew that Moses had not circumcised his son? (4) How would God feel about His messenger living in open disobedience to His command?

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

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

Living with family is as important as leading God’s family.

Bible Commentary

Shaped by faith and patience from birth through 120 years of tumultuous life, Moses stands as a model in almost any aspect of the Christian journey or vocation. However, this week we look at his life from the perspective of Christian leadership at home and in the community. His life with Zipporah, his respect for Jethro, and his affection for his siblings show us that God-guided inclusion of others in one’s life adds to one’s strength and makes one’s service more effective.

Moses and Zipporah: A Man of Faith and a Woman of Love

By faith Moses gave up Egypt (Heb. 11:23–28). Believing, forsaking, and embracing are the essentials of a Christian journey. There is no compromise here. For 40 years Moses lived in Pharaoh’s palace, trained in the best of Egypt’s education, heir to the throne, with all the riches and pleasures at his command. But when the moment of realization dawned that he was meant for a higher purpose, he believed, gave up Egypt, and by faith embraced the not-yet clear call of God. He reached the desert of Midian where the wait lasted 40 years. Faith knows neither rush nor indifference, but only patient and prayerful waiting for the Author and Finisher of faith to act in His own time.

“Moses was content to live with the man” (Exod. 2:21, NKJV). Jethro was the man who gave Moses a place to live, a job as a shepherd, and his daughter Zipporah as wife. A lonely wanderer finds contentment because he chose to walk by faith. But it took another 40 years for God to reveal His call to Moses, assure him by the burning bush, and set him on his track back to his job. Service and leadership in God’s cause are not ours to grasp but God’s to give in His own way and time. In those years of waiting in Midian, Moses had to learn “not to rely upon human strength or wisdom, but upon the power of God for the fulfillment of His promises.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 247. Even as Moses took his family to Egypt, he was not quite ready for his role. In his love for Zipporah, he yielded to her persuasion (see Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 255, 256) and neglected to circumcise his son—a grievous indifference to the covenant. God was about to slay Moses (Exod. 4:24). No one is above the law, and certainly not even the most beloved of this world can be a hindrance to
Zipporah With Miriam and Aaron

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why is racial or ethnic prejudice repugnant in those who profess to follow Christ? What concrete steps can you take to help purge your heart of this sinful disease?
obeying God. But Zipporah saw her error and performed the rite herself. A wife of that kind who is ready to surrender to God is a noble asset to any man on the way to lead God’s people.

**Discuss:** Can God ever tolerate a leader within the church who willfully lives in open disobedience to His command? Is there anything in your married life that gets in the way of total obedience to God?

**STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** Discuss the following and draw out lessons helpful to everyday Christian living.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Did God approve Moses’ marriage to a Midianite woman? If so, why this exception?

2. What is the secret of good relations between Moses and his father-in-law?

**Application Question:**

John and Joseph are two brothers, both working in the church as pastors. John gets chosen as the conference president. Joseph’s wife whispers to her husband that he should have gotten the job because he is better qualified. The whisper leads to distance and discord among family members. How would you bring about a reconciliation?

**Witnessing**

Marriage is a pre-Fall institution, like the Sabbath. It is sacred and holy and requires our utmost attention. Mention ways whereby a Christian home—husband and wife, in-laws, brothers and sisters, children—can make it a center of Christian love and witnessing.
Moses and His Brother-in-Law

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What are some decisions you need to make soon? As you plan, ask yourself, What are my motives? After thinking about those motives, might you need to change your plans? Is doing the right thing for the wrong reason still doing the “right” thing?
STEP 4—Apply!

**Just for Teachers:** Return to 1 Corinthians 13. Here are four great principles. Encourage your class to share freely their testimonies as to how they have kept or broken them.

- Love is not rude.
- Love is not self-seeking.
- Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
- Love always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres.

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

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

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **What kind of prejudices are prevalent in your own society?**
   - Ethnic, religious, national, gender, economic? What have been the baneful results? How can we learn to recognize prejudice in ourselves? Most important, what can we do to help purge this from society, the church, and ourselves? As a class, what can you do to help alleviate the suffering of others brought about by prejudice?

2. **As we saw earlier, the daughters of Jethro initially believed that Moses was an Egyptian. This shows the power of culture over our lives. What culture are you living in? How does it impact your faith?**
   - As a class, talk about the things in your culture that jive well with your faith and the things that are in conflict with it. Identify together some of the problem areas and then talk about whatever things you can do to help yourselves and other church members work through these challenges.

**Summary:** When Zipporah married Moses, she had no idea what was coming. Yet, from the little said about her, we can see that she and her family were a blessing to Moses and a great help in his divine mission.
Lesson 6

*August 4–10

Samson and His Women: The Folly of Passion

SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

The story of Samson presents many challenges to the modern reader. A lot of things just seem hard to understand, which only goes to show that, as Paul said, we see through “a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Only after Jesus returns will we get the full picture. Nevertheless, even through a “glass darkly” there’s enough there for us to learn a few good lessons from the rather sordid story of Samson and his wife and Delilah.

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 11.
The Call of Samson

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Text: 1 John 2:16

Teach the Class to:
Know: Put God first in matters of the heart.
Feel: The danger of making poor relationship choices.
Do: Count the cost of human infatuation and lust.

Lesson Outline:

I. Samson—the Destroyer (Judg. 13:2–5)
   A Before Samson is even an embryo, the angel instructs his parents not to “drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing.” To what extent do a mother’s choices influence her unborn child?
   B The Samsonite luggage company knew what they were doing when they named their product. How does praying in the strength of Jesus’ name give spiritual muscle to our prayers?
   C Hun warriors wore their hair long when they rode into battle. The Bible also tells of “long-haired warriors” (Note: This is in a footnote about Deut. 32:42 in the Contemporary English Version), like Samson, who grew their hair to show they had taken sacred vows to their gods. How do our lives witness that God has called us to serve Him?

II. Delilah—the Consumer (Judg. 14:1–4; 16:1, 4)
   A A “lion roared against Samson,” but the “spirit of the Lord came mightily upon [him],” and he tore it apart. Satan, too, “goes about like a roaring lion seeking to devour.” How is Samson’s victory over the lion God’s promise to us of victory over sin?
   B Samson “loved” Delilah. Yet, Delilah sells him out to the Philistines for money to buy 275 slaves, proving that her name might mean “consumer.” How is this a warning about what happens when we cherish sin?

III. Eyeless in Gaza (Judg. 16:17, 18, 28–30)
   A When Delilah cuts Samson’s hair, the Lord leaves him. Familiarity with sin deadens us to the Spirit’s leading. What safeguards us against this delusion?
   B Eyeless and chained like a dog, Samson pleads with God to give him strength to pull down the temple of Dagon. How does God rescue us to the “uttermost” (Heb. 7:25) the moment we turn to Him?

Summary: Genuine love is based on a strong, loving relationship with God.
Samson’s Wedding Day

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

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

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

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

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

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

★STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Samson’s birth is a divine intervention for a specific call. But his life turned out to be one of folly, sensual infatuation, moral failure, and emotional disaster. Yet, the book of Hebrews includes his name among those who will inherit the eternal kingdom (see Heb. 11:32). This is truly a remarkable story of human folly and divine grace. Keep this focus before your class as you study the lesson.

The Bible is full of stories that illustrate human failure and divine rescue through grace. Consider the fall of Adam and Eve, the choice of Lot to dwell in Sodom, the jealousy of Miriam and Aaron, the sensuous detour of Samson, the premeditated sin of David, and the distant land of the prodigal son. Each case reveals, on the one hand, willful human rebellion against God—the deliberate betrayal of the Father’s trust, the sensual pull of the distant land, and choosing to worship at the altar of self even when that means the rejection of the Creator. On the other hand, each case also reveals the undying love and the ever wooing and waiting of God’s grace.

Discuss: In view of the above, what do the following texts mean to you? “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Rom. 5:20, NKJV). “‘The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out’” (John 6:37, NKJV).

★STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: Samson and his misadventures of self-rooted will show how power, if not kept under the discipline of God’s will and purpose, can turn a life of great possibility to unbelievable tragedy. Help your class members realize how true this is in our life—be it personal, family, or church life.

Bible Commentary

Of the many God has called to fulfill His will, Samson is the most tragic case of all. The tragedy lies in preferring the desire of self against the service of God, in embracing the forbidden in open defiance of God’s will, in the failure to recognize the meaning and purpose of power. Yet, in spite of such tragedies, God’s grace manifests itself as the real source of strength, salvation, and hope.
Samson’s Revenge

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A miracle child, a self-centered man. Samson is a miracle child, like Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist; but it is not the miracle that makes the man but what he chooses to do with it. A miracle just opens the door to great possibilities, but walking through that door is left to individual choice of whether to obey the will of the One who caused this wonder to begin with. Being sanctified as a Nazarite (see Judg. 13:5) and raised by God-fearing parents who consistently asked, “What shall we do for the child?” (vs. 8) paved the high road for Samson’s pursuit of his calling. But Samson chose the low road. He was called to deliver Israel from the Philistines, but the first act of his manhood is the choice of a Philistine girl for a wife. “Get her for me, for she pleases me well,” he almost orders his father (Judg. 14:3, NKJV). The wishes of me become paramount, and the will of God is set aside. “She pleases me well” becomes the criterion of the most important choice a man can make. Will she please God? Will she help me serve God? Does she worship my God at all? The person whose priority is self has no time for such questions, and quickly Samson forgets that his very existence is a miracle of the Sovereign of the universe, whom to obey is the first duty of every creature. Samson’s downfall began with those words of self-assertion: “She pleases me well.” Even the strength to tear up a lion cannot save him from the betwixtq lion of self-centeredness.

Discuss: Why does the Bible prohibit marriage with an unbeliever? How do you answer the rationale so often offered: “After the wedding, everything will be OK.”

II. Samson and Delilah: Embracing the Forbidden

Strength without discipline, power without purpose. Physical strength does not protect the citadels of one’s soul; that requires spiritual stamina and moral integrity, something Samson lacked and left undeveloped by his fondness for women and close association with idolaters. God’s purpose for Samson’s life was to deliver Israel from their enemies, and He equipped Samson for this purpose with enormous physical courage and strength. But Samson had neither the spiritual discipline nor the moral purpose that alone can empower an individual to carry out God’s will and calling.
The Sad Saga Continues

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“O Lord God, remember me, I pray!” (Judg. 16:28, NKJV). When has God forgotten Samson and a thousand other sinners like him? God never forgets or forsakes. He always remembers sinners and awaits the return of the prodigals. It is we who forget God and live as though we don’t need Him until we come to that desperate, final moment. And Samson found himself at that final moment. Once feared by his enemies, now he stands before them in public display, humbled and humiliated. The human soul is often so stupid and senseless that it requires a humiliating knockdown in order to look up and see the Source “from whence cometh help.” For the first time, Samson publicly acknowledges that there is a higher power, the Sovereign of the universe, to whom he is accountable. He prays, “Remember me . . . strengthen me,” and then he begs, “just this once.” No prayer of such absolute surrender and submission goes without an answer. It is ironic that in the temple of the heathen, amidst sacrifices offered to idols, Samson comes to his senses and grasps the true reality of a living God. God makes the death of Samson a moment of victory.

**By faith Samson.** The story of Samson does not end in the Philistine temple; it ends in the roll call of the faithful of all ages (Heb. 11:32). God’s grace is wide enough, His love deep enough, Christ’s cross real enough to forgive every confessed sin, to embrace every repenting sinner, and to welcome home every prodigal. There lies the road from sin to salvation, and Samson is an enduring example.

**Discuss:** (1) Three times Delilah betrays Samson. Why does he not flee from her instead of succumbing to her pressures? What does this say about the allurement of sex? (2) For 20 years Samson judged over Israel. What does this show about God’s patience with erring leaders and followers alike?

**STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** Lead your class members to discuss the following and draw some principles that will help them in their life and faith.

**Thought Question:**
Samson is the last judge named in the Bible. The first one is Othniel (Judg.
Blinded by Love

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

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

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

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

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

Samson is listed in Hebrews 11:32 as a faithful follower of the Lord. What does it tell us about God’s grace? What hope can you draw from this for yourself?
3:7–11), a model judge who gave Israel 40 years of peace. Compare and contrast the two judges. What lessons can you draw from their life and mission?

**Application Questions:**
Marriage is a sacred ordinance, and sex is God’s beautiful gift to human beings. From Samson’s story, what do you learn about guarding the sacredness and purity of such a precious gift? What pitfalls should we avoid?

**STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** Following are some principles that can be drawn from today’s lesson. Consider their relevance and application for today.

“To a godly man, and to the church with which he is connected, a worldly wife or a worldly friend is as a spy in the camp, who will watch every opportunity to betray the servant of Christ, and expose him to the enemy’s attacks.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1006.
**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “True Love or Infatuation,” pp. 50–54, in *The Adventist Home*.

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

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

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **What can you do to help someone who seems to be allowing his or her passions to overrule better spiritual judgment?**

2. **What can you do as a church to give folk who are being tempted the help and encouragement of a strong, loving, and understanding congregation? What changes need to occur in the church so that those who need help can find people who care and understand, as opposed to those who will condemn and judge them?**

3. **As a class, take time together to pray for your church leaders, those given great responsibilities, that they will be protected from making the same kind of mistakes that Samson made.**

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

Read for This Week’s Study: Ruth 1–4.

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

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

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

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 18.
Family Affairs

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

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

1. What parallel is found here with some earlier Bible characters?
   *Ruth 1:1; compare with Gen. 12:10, 26:1.*

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

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

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

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

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

**Key Text:** Ruth 1:16, 17

**Teach the Class to:**
- **Know:** Christ is our nearest Kin-Redeemer.
- **Feel:** The joy of being saved by the Kin-Redeemer.
- **Do:** Determine to have a full spiritual life.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Famine *(Ruth 1)*

A. Ruth belongs to a race begun in incest. Yet, she is honored as the great-grandmother of David and a direct ancestor of Jesus. What hope does this give us, that no matter how far we’ve fallen, Jesus can graft us back in?

B. Naomi and her family leave their land to escape famine, little realizing that they would be such effective missionaries. While we may not serve God in a foreign country, how may we minister to those around us?

II. Plenty *(Ruth 2)*

A. God brings Boaz and Ruth together. Why does this give us hope that God will lead us to the person He has for us if we will trust in Him?

B. Listen to the report about Ruth that the overseer gives Boaz: She works “without resting even for a moment” *(RSV)*. She is the first to go back to the field after her meal and the last to leave work. She even saves a portion of her dinner for Naomi, showing concern for her mother-in-law. How can we be more like Ruth?

III. Redemption *(Ruth 3:8–10)*

A. Ruth goes to the threshing floor and lifts up Boaz’s garment, which literally means “thy wing.” How does God shelter us with His grace to redeem us?

B. Boaz tells Ruth there is “a kinsman closer than I” who has a stronger claim to redeem her. He tells her to wait; obediently she lies down at his feet for the night. In what way does Ruth’s trust in Boaz show us how we should wait at the feet of Jesus for Him to redeem us, despite delays?

C. Naomi changes her name to Mara, which means “bitterness.” But Ruth gives Naomi a son (grandson), Obed, and gives her Boaz, a son-in-law. Has God changed bitterness or loss into a blessing in your life?

**Summary:** Christ, our nearest of kin, redeems us as His lost possessions.
Devotion of Ruth

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, Why is this lesson important to me?

The narrative of Boaz and Ruth serves as a model of exemplary marital relations and as a practical allegory of Christ’s love for humanity, whom He has married to Himself through the gospel (Jer. 3:14, Matt. 22:2).

Scientists conducted an experiment with two dogs. Both were of the same breed, age, weight, and temperament. Each dog was kept separate from the other; yet, both were given identical living conditions, diets, and exercise regimens. The only difference was that the first dog was treated by its handlers in a detached manner. Never cruel or harsh to the animal, they were just impersonal and businesslike. On the other hand, the second dog was given affection. How do you suppose both animals fared? The dog who received proper care minus love became dejected and withdrawn. Its appetite and health declined, whereas the other dog thrived. Researchers concluded that love is indispensable to emotional and physical health.

Consider This: Think of two contrasting relationships in your life in which the truth of these principles was exemplified in one way or another. How have these relationships affected your life and treatment of others?

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

I & II. Family Affairs: Devotion of Ruth (Ruth 1)

The opening chapter of Ruth suggests that the family relations between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law were warm and harmonious. These young widows had both “dealt kindly” with Naomi, a widowed Jewish expatriate to Moab. While Orpah’s love for Naomi was sincere, it lacked spiritual depth. She had never yielded her heart to the God of Israel—the
Boaz

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

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

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

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

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

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

How often a kind word can make such a difference in a person’s life! How quick are you to give praise and affirmation to those around you? Be stingy with criticism; be generous in affirmation.
Lord of Creation. Ruth, on the other hand, had embraced the faith of Judah. Though pagan by birth, she was an Israelite by spiritual adoption. This prompted her magnificent words given in the memory text (Ruth 1:16, 17). Ruth begged Naomi to desist from urging her to remain in her own country and return to its customs. She had walked in the light of the gospel too long now for heathen darkness to have any appeal to her. She was joyfully willing to forsake her country and familiar associations of early life to follow God and pursue her divinely appointed destiny (see Luke 5:11, 14:33).

Consider This: Compare Ruth’s reply to Naomi with the appeal of Cleopas and his companion to Christ in Luke 24:28, 29. What did Ruth see in Naomi that made her desire to worship as a true Jew? What did Cleopas and his friend see in Christ (whose true identity they did not yet recognize) that made them prevail on Him to tarry with them for the night? (Luke 24:30–35).

III. Boaz (Ruth 2)

Boaz’s name means “in him is strength.” He came as one mighty to redeem Ruth from her lonely, impoverished widowhood and from her status as an alien in Judah. He was mighty in compassion, kindness, decency, and graciousness. The parallels between Boaz’s love for Ruth and Christ’s love for His church are delightful and compelling.

Consider This: Jesus came as “one mighty to save” (Isa. 63:1). How did He exhibit that might? How did the manifestation of His restorative power and grace affect the grateful recipients of His care?

IV. The Proposal

In keeping with the customs of that era, Ruth’s coming to Boaz at night (Ruth 3:1–7) bore no taint of impropriety. It is moving to consider her humble yet unwavering confidence in his goodwill toward her. Ruth learned from Naomi that through marriage they were kin to Boaz. This kinship opened an avenue of opportunity for Ruth to become his wife or, at least, for Naomi to regain her lost possession through his assistance (see Lev. 25:25, 48, 49). Ruth complied with Naomi’s instructions. She approached Boaz in a spirit of undemanding supplication. At first alarmed by Ruth’s nocturnal visit to his tent, and lying down at his feet, Boaz quickly understood her purpose when she explained the familial tie
The Proposal

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

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

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

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

**Go back through Ruth 3 again and look at the different character traits revealed there by Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. How well do you manifest these traits in your own life? What upcoming issues and challenges are you facing in which you need to manifest these same traits? Take some time to think through what’s coming and how you can, through the grace of God, do the right thing.**
that existed between them *(Ruth 3:9).*

**Consider This:** What does Boaz’s reply to Ruth reveal about his character and personality? *(Ruth 3:10–13).*

### V. Redemption *(Ruth 4)*

Although Ruth had a nearer kinsman than Boaz, that relative was unwilling to “mar” his “inheritance” *(vs. 6)* by making any sacrifice to improve Naomi and Ruth’s lot. He had not the least inclination to include them in his family on any basis whatsoever. He represents the spirit of self-interest and unconcern for the afflicted and destitute. But Boaz, like Christ, did not consider any price too high in order to be the protector and provider of these two women—women so noble in character, so united in the spirit of familial love, and so deeply consecrated to God.

None of us starts out in a state of ripe spirituality, but through growing contact with Christ our Kinsman-Redeemer, we become like Him and are fully enfolded into His family, not just in name but in relational union. *(See John 15:1–7, 17:20–26, Eph. 3:16–19).* Boaz paid money to redeem Naomi’s inheritance; whereas, Christ redeemed us from our lost state by paying the price with His suffering and blood. But Boaz did more than pay redemption money; he freely gave Ruth his heart of loving affection and was to Naomi a “restorer” of life and a “nourisher of her old age” *(Ruth 4:14, 15).*

God rewarded the faith of all these grace-filled people by giving Ruth and Boaz a happy marriage and crowned them with His loving favor by making them the forebears of King David and of Jesus Himself. Truly, Christ was in them, the hope of glory. What an inspiring model for Christian marriage and home life!

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**STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

**Thought Questions:**

1. The world presents Christians with many opportunities to go back into
Redemption

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

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

**What were the duties of a kinsman-redeemer?** Lev. 25:25, 47–49; Num. 36:8, 9; Deut. 25:5, 6.

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

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

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

As said earlier, the Bible unfolds within a particular cultural context that can often be hard for those in other cultures to understand fully. All that being said, what universal principles regarding family obligations that should apply to us and our family relationships can we find here? How well are you fulfilling those obligations?
carnal darkness. What forms do those opportunities take, and how is their false allurement extinguished in the life of the believer? (John 8:12, Gal. 5:5–26, Heb. 11:13–16, 1 John 1:7–9).

How is intimacy with God cultivated?

Application Question:
Review the qualities of Ruth’s character exhibited by her words and behavior. How does our deportment affect our influence and prospects in life?

Witnessing
Whether married or single, how does beauty of character and graciousness of behavior affect your influence for the gospel?

Consider This: What traits do you possess that do not rightly represent Christ? How important is it to you that these traits be changed by the transforming touch of God’s grace?

STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Read Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 334–342 (on speech and influence). Consider what these pages have to say about our personal influence and how others are affected by what we are, for good or evil. It is not by contemplating our faults and shortcomings that we are transformed into Christ’s image but by reverently beholding Him.

How can you find more time to “behold Him”? Act on these findings. Take time to communicate with and serve more compassionately and bountifully those who are part of your life.

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

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

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Look at Naomi’s reaction in Ruth 1:19–21. Compare it to her words in Ruth 2:20. Why is this such a common reaction? What’s wrong, however, with her “theology”?

2. As a class, discuss your answers to Tuesday’s last question. What do your answers tell you about yourself and your church? What things in your church would draw people to it? What things would push people away? What practical things need to be changed in order to make your church something that would draw others to it and to the God you represent? How can you as a class help to start implementing the needed changes?

3. As a class, talk about your own culture and how it deals with family relationships. What things in your culture work toward strengthening those relationships? What things work against it? What can you do to help others better understand their obligations to family members?

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

SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Ask yourself, What aspects of Elkanah’s character could I better emulate in my own personal relations and in my relationship with the Lord?
I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

Key Text: 1 Samuel 2:2

Teach the Class to:

- Know: God listens to and answers prayer.
- Feel: The joy in keeping their vow to the Lord.
- Do: Dedicate their children anew to the Lord.

Lesson Outline:

I. Asking and Believing (1 Sam. 1:1–19)

- **A** The Bible lists Hannah’s name before Penninah’s, implying she was the first wife; her childlessness most likely motivated a second marriage, fomenting strife. What practices threaten peace in modern marriages?

- **B** Elkanah asks, “Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am I not better to thee than ten sons?” (1 Sam. 1:8). His last question offers dubious comfort, especially since by taking a second wife he makes it clear to Hannah that her love is obviously not enough for him! How can we build up love instead of tearing it down?

II. Promising and Receiving (1 Sam. 1:19–23, Heb. 4:16)

- **A** Hannah doesn’t wallow in self-pity. She finds refuge in the sanctuary, where Eli blesses her with “May the God of Israel grant thee thy petition” (1 Sam. 1:17). Why does Hannah’s prayer give us hope that Jesus answers the petitions we bring Him?

- **B** Hannah recognized that her gift to God was His gift to her. What gifts has God given you? How have you given them back to Him?

III. Fulfilling the Vow (1 Sam. 1:24–2:21, Isa. 64:6)

- **A** Wearing the priestly ephod at such a young age is a testament to Samuel’s upbringing. What can we learn from Elkanah and Hannah about rearing children?

- **B** Each year, Hannah sews a garment and takes it to her son in the temple. Jesus brings us the beautiful garment of His character. What are the “filthy rags” that He wants to rid us of first?

Summary: The Lord honors the prayer of faith. Children are His gift to us.
The Marriage

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

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

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

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

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

**STEP 1—Motivate!**

**Just for Teachers:** Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

Elkanah and Hannah lived in quiet consecration to God. From the standpoint of most observers, they would have been deemed decent but nondescript people. But their dedication to God moved them into circumstances that enabled them to become parents of one of the noblest men this world has ever seen—a man who helped Israel regain and maintain its corporate identity as God’s chosen people. One thing is clear from their story: We are not to despise our ordinary talents and opportunities or underestimate what God can do through us to advance His kingdom if we are faithful to Him.

**Consider This:** Think of someone (outside your family) who made a strikingly positive difference in your life. What qualities did they possess, and what virtues did they exercise that favorably influenced you?

**STEP 2—Explore!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God’s Word?*

**Bible Commentary**

I. Elkanah

Elkanah was a Kohathite of the Levites. The Kohathites served as judges and rulers. They were bearers of the ark, keepers of the sacred treasures, and singers in the sanctuary *(Num. 3:27–32; 1 Sam. 1:1; 1 Chron. 6:22–27, 34; 2 Chron. 20:19–22).* But in Elkanah’s day the Koathites had fallen into relative obscurity because of the irreligious domination of high priest Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, whom God called sons of Belial *(1 Sam. 2:12).* But Elkanah remained faithful in the midst of this apostasy. He made
Hannah’s Vow

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

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

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

1. ________________________ 2. ________________________ 3. ________________________

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

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

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

**We might not always have such a clear answer to our prayers, but what Bible promises can you lean on that help you trust in the Lord’s goodness and care, promises that should give you the kind of peace Hannah experienced?**
a yearly visit to worship and sacrifice to the Lord at Shiloh.
In those days of spiritual darkness, it was not unusual for a man to have two wives as Elkanah did. Elkanah was good to his family but was unable to assuage the grief of his godly wife Hannah over her barrenness (1 Sam. 1:4–8).

II. The Marriage
Elkanah would have done well to consider the heartbreak and turmoil that Abraham brought on himself and his household by marrying Hagar, his wife Sarah’s servant, in order to have a child (Genesis 16). This was a deviation from God’s original law of marriage (Gen. 2:18–24; Mal. 2:14, 15). God’s Word presents an account of the failings of even His finest followers, not to discredit them or to condone their failings but to warn all future generations that sin is not excusable in anyone (see 1 Cor. 10:11–14). Faithfulness in some aspects of life does not atone for departure from God’s instruction in other particulars. Elkanah’s bigamy tarnished his record and blighted the happiness of everyone in his household—particularly that of Hannah, his first wife, who, unlike her rival Peninnah, was a truly consecrated woman. Peninnah had a fertile womb but a barren heart, while it was the converse with Hannah.

Consider This: What are the results of faithful adherence to the Word of God? (Deut. 28:1–14, Prov. 28:20, Matt. 24:45–47, Rev. 2:10). What are the results of ignoring God’s instructions (Deut. 28:15–37, Matt. 25:24–30)?

III. Hannah’s Vow
What kept the grieving Hannah from becoming resentful and vindictive in her relations with Peninnah, who mocked Hannah for her infertility and gloried in her own fruitfulness in childbearing? Hannah was a woman of prayer. She learned to roll her burden on the Lord and specifically pour out her woes and longings into the ear of the only One who could really do anything about her plight (see Ps. 37:1–7, Rom. 5:5, 8:24).
Hannah prayed for a son, not merely for her own gratification but to bring a godly child into the world who would be a blessing to God’s cause. She renounced all selfish claims on the child that she hoped to bear (1 Sam. 1:11).
Hannah, Mother in Israel

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

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

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

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

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

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Consider This: How can we deal with life’s cruel disappointments in a way that can turn them from stumbling blocks into stepping stones for the development of our character and faith? (Ps. 119:67–71; Rom. 5:1–5; 2 Cor. 4:17, 18; 12:8–10; Heb. 12:11; 1 Pet. 4:12–19).

IV. Hannah, Mother in Israel

God graciously answered Hannah’s petition for a son. Her heart must have ached as she relinquished little Samuel, after weaning him, to the care of Eli at the temple. Eli was not an exemplary father, and her son would be away from all the gracious, supportive influences of home. But with her husband’s full support, Hannah remained true to her vow. She had dedicated Samuel to the Lord in this specific way and would not retract her word, despite the poignant claims of maternal love (1 Sam. 1:19–28).

Under the Spirit’s inspiration, Hannah sang a hymn of praise and prophetic insight into the future triumph of God’s cause—and this at a time when the word of the Lord was scarce, and there was no open vision (1 Sam. 2:1–11, 3:1). She could hardly have foreseen how vital a role Samuel would have in preserving the heritage of Israel and reversing the inroads of apostasy (see 1 Samuel 7). Eli truly appreciated Samuel and fostered early his calling to the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:18, 26; 3:1–18).

Consider This: Hannah and Elkanah could not have had Samuel in their home for much more than three years, and yet, how enduring was their parental influence! What does this tell us about the importance of the spiritual and emotional influences of home life and the importance of laying the right foundation at the beginning of a child’s life, as well as prenatally? (See Deut. 6:4–9, Luke 1:13–17, Eph. 6:4, 2 Tim. 3:15).

Identify basic elements that make for a wholesome family life.

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Thought Questions:
What values did Hannah and Elkanah have that distinguished them from
The Family Legacy

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

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

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

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

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

Were you to “die in the Lord” today, what deeds would follow you? What does your answer tell you about how you’re living your life? What changes might you consider making?
the Hebrew people in their day? Review the spiritual condition of Israel at that time (Judg. 21:25; 1 Sam. 2:17, 22–24, 29; 3:1, 11–14; 4:21, 22). There were two primary categories of people in those days of spiritual dearth—the immoral and the demoralized. But then there was a third group, relatively small—the consecrated. How were they able to maintain their devotion to God amid such widespread apostasy? (1 Sam. 12:20–25; Psalms 118; 125; Rom. 8:31–39; 12:1, 2; Titus 2:11–14).

Application Question:
Based on the thought questions above, what can you do to sharpen spiritual discernment in our world today? (1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 1:18–20; 5:17; 1 John 5:19, 20).

Witnessing
“The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 32.

Consider This: How can even a single person benefit from this counsel? (Psalm 133, Eph. 4:1–18).

STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: Review Hannah and Elkanah’s story. List five characteristics that made them stand as a bulwark against spiritual darkness and discouragement. Parallel that list with specific examples of their actions that demonstrate each of these characteristics.

What can keep you from being polluted by the godless mores of contemporary culture?

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

Discussion Questions:

1. This story is a nice example of a faithful couple being rewarded for their fidelity. What about cases in which, it seems, faithful people aren’t rewarded, at least now in what appears to be in any tangible way? As a class, talk about such cases. What answers do you have?

2. So many people have been so terribly damaged by a poor upbringing. What promises and hope can you offer to someone who struggles in overcoming the damage done to them in childhood?

3. We all know stories of faithful parents who, though doing their best to raise their children right, suffer terribly when those children leave the faith. Talk frankly about this situation. What encouragement and hope can you share with each other?

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

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 1.*
The Story of Job

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

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

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

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

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

▸ **Key Text:** Job 2:10

▸ **Teach the Class to:**
  - **Know:** Bad things happen to good people.
  - **Feel:** They can turn to Jesus for healing in crises.
  - **Do:** Uplift others with their words.

▸ **Lesson Outline:**

  I. Fire, Wind, Blood *(Job 1:8–22, 31)*
  
  A Five hundred yoke of oxen and she-donkeys stolen by the Sabeans; the servants put to the sword; 7,000 sheep burned to ashes, along with their shepherds; 3,000 camels stolen by the Chaldeans; a tornado-force wind demolishing the house, killing all ten of Job’s children. All this happens *within the same hour*. But Job “fell down upon the ground, and worshipped” *(Job 1:20)*. Why was this his response after such staggering loss?

  B Satan argues that Job will curse God “to thy face” if stricken with disease. Boils burst out all over Job’s body. Why are our efforts to remove sin as effective as Job’s potsherd that merely scrapes at his boils?

  II. Job’s Wife: A Second Look *(Job 2:9, 19:17)*
  
  A Job’s wife tells him to “curse God, and die.” What kind of effect do our words have? In what ways can we use them to uplift our spouses?

  B Job says that his breath “is strange to my wife,” alluding to the smell of his rotting flesh. It wouldn’t smell like that if she stayed away from him. Obviously, her devotion to her husband is not just in health and in wealth. Does love have to suffer when we suffer? Why, or why not?

  III. A Look at Ourselves *(Job 31:1, 42:12–17)*
  
  A Job doesn’t just make a marriage vow with his *body*; he makes it with his eyes. What does it mean to make a “covenant with mine eyes” as Job did?

  B Jemima, Keziah, and Kerenhappuch—the daughters of Job born to him after his scourge—are so beautiful the Bible records their names (unlike his sons who are referred to only by number). How has God restored what you’ve lost?
Remember Job’s Wife

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, Why is this lesson important to me?

We have all heard that God works good in all things to those who love Him (see Rom. 8:28). Job’s story prevents this truth from ever seeming like a mere platitude and brings into luminous display the issues of the great controversy between good and evil as it affects the lives of us all on a profoundly personal basis. It also presents a sterling example of how a person of faith may endure the most agonizing trials and formidable tests of character. Job’s proverbial patience (see James 5:11) was not a species of bland fatalism. Rather, it was an enduring force that enabled him to weather storms and surmount the barriers that Satan devises to obscure humanity’s vision of God as He truly is—a God of love, gracious providence, protective vigilance, and infinite mercy.

Consider This: Many of the sufferings that befall Christians are not the result of God’s displeasure but the result of His high calling for our lives to refine our character by making us partakers of Christ’s sufferings. Paul related to such suffering as a creative opportunity to become a heaven-molded, empathetic comforter of the afflicted (Rom. 15:1–6, 2 Cor. 1:3–11, 1 Thess. 3:1–9).

How do you deal with suffering, setbacks, and losses? Do these trying developments weaken your faith or strengthen it? What reasons do you have for your answer?

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

CONTINUED
Satan’s Temptresses

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

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

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

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

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

I. The Story of Job

Job’s story unveils the hidden dynamics of much of life’s drama for everyone on earth. We are all, in our own way, like Job. Satan seeks to encompass our ruin through temptations and trials that seem to be arbitrary acts of God, while actually of malevolent demonic origin. On the other hand, God employs every loving, honest means possible to save us from ruin and to restore us to our originally intended status as sons and daughters of His, and as partakers of the divine nature (Heb. 12:3–10, Rev. 3:19–22).

Satan was determined to discredit God and justify his own rebellion by exposing Job as a time-serving sycophant whose professed love for God was firmly anchored in self-interest (Job 1, 2). God knew of Job’s unfeigned devotion to Him and allowed Satan to put Job’s faith and character to a series of extreme tests that categorically span the entire range of human suffering. Job was God’s model servant. He knew His man well. Job’s loyalty, through the power of divine grace, may be just as strongly interwoven in our hearts. Moreover, we have God’s explanation of the issues behind the scenes that were hidden from Job’s view while he was in the thick of his tribulations.

Consider This: Job candidly (but not rancorously) questioned God’s permitting (or causing) so many catastrophes to descend on him. Although utterly mystified by these thick clouds of calamity, Job was supported by the one indispensable quality that enables all the afflicted to finally overcome—faith that is rooted and grounded in the knowledge of God (Job 13:15, 16; 14:12–15; 19:22–29; compare with Rom. 8:29–34; 1 John 4:4; 5:4, 5). Job’s faith was not simplistic or sentimental—it was braced with the sinew of tried experience and the tensile strength of persevering confidence in the living God who conquers darkness, despair, and death through the deathless power of the gospel.

II. Job’s Wife

Job faced the dual challenge of misdirected reproof from his friends whose original intent was to comfort him, and from his wife, who construed their sufferings as an unjust visitation from God. She counseled her husband to “curse God and die.” She must have eventually repented...
Curse God and Die!

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

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

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

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

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

How careful are you with your words? What can you do to make sure that you don’t say things that you will regret later, things that can bring suffering upon yourself and others?
of these rash and irreverent words. But in the account as presented in the book of Job, her role was disappointingly unexemplary and stands as a clangorous warning that anger toward God for any reason whatever is wholly unwarranted. It simply exacerbates the misery of all who are exposed to its manifestation. Truly, as James stated, “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).

**Consider This:** Who is the paramount exemplar of patience in suffering? (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Mark 15:9–37). What can we learn (not just theologically but in the depths of our hearts) by considering Christ’s example as the Prince of sufferers? (1 Pet. 2:21–25).

**STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Job ardently sought for answers, but he did not insist that he must have a full explanation of every issue related to his baffling ordeal. In fact, the more his friends barraged him with sanitary truisms, the more Job insisted that life held inscrutable mysteries which could not all be tidily summarized in apophoristic packages. (See Job 12–14, 19, 26–28.) But in the midst of all his uncertainty, Job knew that his Redeemer lives and that He would bring ultimate resolution to life’s greatest mysteries and inequities, with perfect justice and mercy combined. But Job’s plea was for his friends not to barricade themselves behind moralistic exhortations as a substitute for compassionate understanding. (See Job 6, 7, 16.) God took it further. He accused these polished moralizers of making erroneous suppositions about Himself and His ways (see Job 42:7, 8). Thus they had misjudged Job and lost the opportunity to be a comfort to him.

**Thought Questions:**

The tide of Job’s suffering was turned when he prayed for his friends. Much of human suffering directly stems from a rupture in our relationship with others. What lessons can we learn from Job’s intercession for those who had proven to be such “miserable comforters” to him? What effect does such praying have in the heart of one who so prays? (Matt. 5:10–12; Luke 6:22, 23).
Supporting Each Other

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

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

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

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

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

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

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

Read the first chapter of 1 Peter. What message does he have there that parallels the story of the Jobs? Then ask yourself, How well do I hold up under suffering? What lessons do I need to learn that will better enable me to remain faithful regardless of the circumstances?
STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

“Learn the lessons of meekness and lowliness in the school of Christ. Realize how much he bore for us, and then count it not a mark of God’s anger that you have some trials to bear for Jesus. If you trust God, the trials will always prove a blessing, and your faith will come forth the brighter, the stronger, the purer. Satan is always trying to press the soul into distrust of God, and therefore we must educate the mind to trust him. Talk faith and hope when Satan says, as did the wife of Job, ‘Curse God, and die.’ If you trust God, you will see more reason to trust him. As you talk of his goodness, you will see more of his love to talk about. Thus the mind may be trained to live in the brightness of the Sun of righteousness, and not in the shadow which Satan casts athwart our path. Hope in God, who is the health of our countenance, and our God.”—Ellen G. White, Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, September 1, 1891.

Consider This: The preceding passage contains vital spiritual and psychological principles. The expression of faith augments our faith and banishes gloom; the expression of despair and distrust intensifies our misery and pushes us toward a hopeless outlook. Thus, we should learn to praise God (Pss. 34:1, 42, 43, 71:14, 86:12).

What effect does it have on our minds and faith when we keep ever in view the triumphant outcome of the great controversy that assures us that truth and love will prevail over falsehood and hatred? Read afresh Daniel 12 and Revelation 21 and 22. (See also Matt. 24:13, Heb. 10:32–39, 12:1–5.)

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

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, read aloud your answers to Sunday’s final question. What can you learn from each other? How good are the answers? What questions remain unanswered? How can we help each other live with unanswered questions about pain and suffering?

2. What are practical ways in which spouses can work to encourage, uplift, and help each other spiritually, as opposed to being instruments of temptation and the cause that makes it easier for the other to stumble?

3. Is there someone in your church who has recently suffered a tragedy? What can you do as a class, in a practical way, to encourage that person and to help him or her work through the grief?

4. As a class, talk about the idea of taking the name of the Lord in vain. What are examples of how we might even unwittingly be guilty of that sin? Think about phrases, curses, idioms, and slang words in your own language as you discuss the answer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 8.
Precursor to a Fall

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

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

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

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

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

What has been your own experience with powerful temptations, with addictions, with drives that seem to control you rather than vice versa? What promises do we have for victory? What choices do you have to make in order to make those promises real in your own life?
Key Text: Psalm 51:10

Teach the Class to:
- **Know:** God pardons those who ask forgiveness in faith.
- **Feel:** The joy of forgiveness.
- **Do:** Determine to keep love alive through trust in God.

Lesson Outline:

I. When Kings Go to War (2 Sam. 11:2–5, 26; 12:19)

A. David looks out over the rooftops of his city and sees the beautiful wife of one of his soldiers bathing. Why does David’s prosperity pose more danger to him than poverty and persecution did?

B. God tells David “a son shall be born to thee. His name shall be Solomon.” This is prophesied well in advance of the adultery he commits with Bathsheba. What does the fact that the promised son comes from Bathsheba, and not from one of his other wives, teach us about God’s forgiveness?

C. The fourfold curse David pronounces upon himself to Nathan is paid in the blood of his sons. What is it about God’s justice that allows Him to be so merciful?

II. Thou Art the Man (2 Sam. 11:6–25)

A. David, intoxicated with lust for Bathsheba, loses all sense of his obligation to God. How do we guard against this indifference?

B. Bathsheba: temptress or victim? She does not speak during the seduction or subsequent plot to murder her husband. Some would judge her silence to be complicity with the crimes. Or perhaps, the parable of the poor man’s love for his one sheep indicates Uriah’s love for his wife and hers for him. How should we interpret things on which the Scripture is silent?

III. After God’s Own Heart (2 Sam. 12:1–24, Psalm 51)

A. After the death of their son, David comforts Bathsheba. Sharing their pain together helps them both heal. What pattern is here for spouses confronting the loss of a child or other loss in marriage?

B. How does God take the results of David’s lust and covetousness and bring good from the ugly? In what ways does God do this for us?

Summary: Confession, faith in God, and prayer bring the joy of forgiveness.
The Fall

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, Why is this lesson important to me?

HEAD OF STATE HAS AFFAIR WITH WIFE OF WAR HERO. Sounds like the latest political sex scandal just made the front page of yet another tabloid, right? Guess again. While the Bible doesn’t phrase it quite like that, the story of David and Bathsheba does sound as though it could have been ripped from today’s headline news.

The Bible records this sordid chapter in the life of “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14) for more than mere shock value. It’s a warning about what happens when reason shuts down and lust holds full sway. David would have done well to have taken a page out of Job’s book—or at least one text—in which Job makes an oath with his eyes (Job 31:1) to look at only one woman. Though moral purity and marital happiness often seem rare these days, it doesn’t have to be that way. Not if we allow Jesus to fill us with love that draws others in only one direction: toward Him. (Resolve to keep your hearts pure. Look for light in this week’s lesson to keep your resolve strong.)

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Bible Commentary

I. Precursor to a Fall

Wars, the affairs of state, and David’s foolish conformity to the custom of having multiple wives and concubines all combined to sap the foundations of his spirituality. He progressively drifted away from the simple rustic life during which he could sincerely sing, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. . . . He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” David had become jaded, worldly, sated with success, power, and importance. Gradually losing sight of his own dependence on God, he trusted his own strength, prowess, and ingenuity.

CONTINUED
The Cover-up

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

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

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


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

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

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

David’s armies had been victorious over all their foes. It was at this very point, when complacency was likeliest to set in, that Satan seized his opportunity to present flesh-pleasing allurements to David. The stress of war was over. David had forgotten the need for perpetual vigilance against the unremitting enemy of his soul. The lesson is the same for us. Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (Rom. 11:20–22, 1 Cor. 10:12).

III. The Cover-up

The loss of conscious integrity opens the way for endless deceptions and denials, which further weaken the fabric of character and often entangle one in crimes that would have seemed to the perpetrators impossible to commit. Entrenched deception is a ruthless force. It has no stopping place, no boundaries beyond which it will not go. If David had made a clean sweep of matters even after his adultery with Bathsheba, it could not have gone for him and others as badly as it did. Uriah and many of his soldiers died as a result of David’s duplicity and cowardice; Joab became an accomplice in this crime; Ahithophel turned traitor; Bathsheba was left in perplexity and emotional ravagement scarcely conceivable to anyone who has not been enmeshed in such treacherous toils. David’s crime created a vile precedent for his son Amnon, who dragged his unwilling sister Tamar into incest. This also led to the shedding of innocent blood (2 Samuel 13). David’s one transgression spawned a riptide of moral devastation that helped lead to the ruin of Israel as a kingdom. His sin irrecoverably undermined the people’s confidence in their rulers and gave them a pretext to transgress as they saw fit.

Consider This: Have you ever committed a crime? Have you made this matter right, or are you still living under a cloud of concealed guilt and condemnation? If so, seek sound scriptural and pastoral counsel, and do what is right (Ps. 32:5–7, Prov. 28:13).

IV. The Wages of Sin

Bathsheba’s husband and her child by David were casualties of this illicit alliance. David had pronounced the death sentence against himself when Nathan told a parable depicting the essential features of David’s crime (2 Sam. 12:1–14). David was subject to a death greater
The Wages of Sin

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

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

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

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

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

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

Forgiven sin can bring about horrible consequences anyway. What lesson can you take from this story as you daily confront temptations to sin?
than mere execution for his dual crime of adultery and murder. He was subject to the penalty of eternal death (see Rom. 3:23, Rev. 20:12–15). Had David not repented so thoroughly and sincerely, his end would have been no better than King Saul’s. But see Psalms 32 and 51. This story is a testimony, not to God’s permissiveness but to the great power of His forgiveness and of restoring grace (see Isa. 27:5; Mic. 7:18, 19).

“Though David repented of his sin and was forgiven and accepted by the Lord, he reaped the baleful harvest of the seed he himself had sown. The judgments upon him and upon his house testify to God’s abhorrence of the sin.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 723.

Consider This: Whoever is forgiven much, loves much, but at the same time he must remain contritely distrustful of himself and recognize that some of the consequences of transgression must remain with him all his life. Do you see David’s story as a license to sin or as a beacon of warning? Explain.

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Among the leading reasons that people give for adultery are loneliness in marriage (emotional alienation from one’s spouse), feelings of greater compatibility with a forbidden partner, and sense of need to feel affirmed by someone else’s unconditional love. Among the least recognized and least frequently acknowledged of reasons are lust, self-centeredness, lack of commitment to working through marital problems, emotional revenge, ego gratification over being a successful seducer, immature escapism, spiritual darkness, corruption of heart.

Scripture treats adultery as the abominable, inexcusable thing it is (1 Sam. 12:10–12; Mal. 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10). Adultery robes the mind in tangling veils of illusion, duplicity, and lurid machination. It turns vibrant people into skulking shadows, whose lives are a lie. “Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul” (Prov. 6:32).

Having said all this, we must remember that God is willing and able to forgive the adulterer, but unless the perpetrator’s repentance is sincere and
David and Bathsheba: The Final Days

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

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

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

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

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

Any kind of a good relationship—marriage, friendship, or one between a parent and child—needs nurturing. What immediate relationships of yours need some mending, some nurture, some work? What steps can you take to make that relationship better?
deep, he will return as a dog to its vomit or a sow to wallowing in the mire.

**Consider This:** Read Psalm 51 (which he wrote in response to the prophet Nathan’s indictment of him over the affair with Bathsheba) and look for the dimensions and intensity of David’s repentance and his recognition that without a new heart altogether he will remain a victim of his foul, relentless passions.

**Thought Questions:**

1. What evidence in the psalm shows David’s awareness that he was not in a saving connection with God as long as he was sinning? (vss. 51:1, 2, 6–12, 17).

2. How important to David—and to God—was heartbroken repentance for sins committed? (Ps. 34:18, Isa. 57:15, Rom. 2:1–11). What bearing does this question have on relations between husbands and wives? (Eph. 4:29–32, 5:19–33, 1 Pet. 3:1–9).

**STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Why are the most scrupulous or moral ideals alone not a sufficient safeguard against corruption of character and conduct? (Jer. 10:23, 13:23, 17:9, Rom. 3:1–26, Eph. 4:22–24).

Evaluate your life. What do you read, watch, and listen to? Identify which of your activities may be fraying your morals (Phil. 4:8). What do you plan to do about this? How important to you and for you is action on this issue?


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

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

Discussion Questions:

- **Read the story of Nathan with David (2 Sam. 12:1–8).** Notice how obvious it should have been to David, right from the start, that this story was about him. And yet, he totally missed it. What lessons can we take from this about how easy it is to deceive ourselves regarding sin? As a class, talk about what precautions we can take to protect ourselves, and each other, from falling into such gross self-deception.

- **As a class, read Psalm 51 together.** Discuss the elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ that are found there. What does it teach us about the power of God’s grace in our lives?

- **What practical spiritual truths can we learn from the story of David and Bathsheba that can help us avoid the kind of mistakes made here?** What can we do to help each other avoid the kind of pit that David fell into?

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

SABBATH AFTERNOON

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Key Text:** 2 Corinthians 6:14

**Teach the Class to:**
- **Know:** Power and authority are gifts of God.
- **Feel:** The injustice of Jezebel’s accusations against Naboth.
- **Do:** Strive to be honest and compassionate to others.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Bad to the Bone (1 Kings 16:30–33, 2 Kings 9:30–37)

A Jezebel’s family tree is rotten to the roots—Ahab, weak and selfish; her genocidal daughter, Athaliah; and her father, King Ethbaal, priest of the lewd fertility goddess Astarte. Jezebel imports this worship into Israel. Obviously, Ahab doesn’t change Jezebel; she changes him. Why?

B Jezebel’s bio reads like a rap sheet for extortion, genocide, murder, idolatry, blackmail. Her forceful personality dominated her husband. What happens in marriage when one spouse dominates the other?

II. The True Exercise of Authority (1 Kings 21:25)

A “But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, who Jezebel his wife stirred up.” What does this reveal about the nature and lure of sin?

B Psalm 45:13 speaks of a gold dress worn by a princess of Tyre. Some scholars believe that this refers to Jezebel. Even if this were true, imagine the cost and opulence of such a garment. Yet, this is nothing compared to a pure character. Why are all our riches rags without Jesus’ grace?

III. Death by Dogs (1 Kings 21:1-4, 2 Kings 9:30-37)

A Ahab craves the vineyard of Naboth and won’t eat until he gets it. Naboth’s fate shows us where Ahab’s disastrous hunger leads. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness” (Matt. 5:6, NIV). What is the difference between the two hungers?

B Two of Jezebel’s eunuchs push her out a window. Her body was trampled by horses and eaten by dogs that left only the palms of her hands. How ironic this is because she used her hands to commit her evil deeds. How do we keep our hands and hearts pure before God? Why is this essential?

**Summary:** Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.
Power Couple

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

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, Why is this lesson important to me?

A book describes the lives of the people detained in a camp during a war in Asia. One chapter talks about the development of a black market within the camp. Because of the black market, precious commodities like eggs, sugar, and milk—not known to be available in the camp—soon became regular items on the menu. When the soldiers running the camp found out about the black market operation, they shot the people involved, not to put an end to the black market but rather to take over the illegal business themselves and make and keep the money for themselves. Ask the class to name characters in the Bible who abused power. Examples: Saul, Absalom, Herod the Great, Judas, Pilate, David.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Imagine having total, complete control of everybody and everything. How far would you go in using your power? What would be your limit, the line you would not cross? Would a good motive justify a dictatorial use of power?

Thanks to sin, life is filled with strife and tests of faith. Every time we are tested with difficulties, we brace ourselves by saying it is a time of testing and look forward to the future when life will take a more favorable turn. In reality, the greatest tests of spiritual fortitude occur not during difficult times but during the good times.

Take Joseph, for instance. He probably thought being gagged and sold by his own brothers and sent to a foreign land was his greatest test. But it was not. His greatest test came when he had control, had power, had authority to get back at his brothers. It is one thing to be tested when you are powerless and have no options; it is another to be tested when given the opportunity to get revenge and have self-satisfying options at your disposal.

While poverty, suffering, or injustice may be tests that come our way
Jezebel and Elijah

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

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

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

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

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

*What kind of negative influences are you surrounded with? What can you do, as much as possible, to negate those influences?*
from time to time, like Joseph, we are tested most by the power that is ours and the way that we use it. Our lesson this week shows how power is abused (specifically by Ahab and Jezebel). Compare this with the way Joseph used the power he had.

The use of power is an act of stewardship. True, legitimate power is a gift from God. Like money, power in itself is not evil; the love of it is evil.

Consider This: The following texts speak of power as stewardship:

- Genesis 1:26  
- John 19:11
- Genesis 9:5–7  
- Romans 13:1
- Genesis 41:15, 16  
- 1 Corinthians 4:6, 7

Just for Teachers: Have the class independently explore the different types of powers and how they may be abused in our society. Listed below are some kinds of power to start the discussion.

**Power of position.** This is the power that comes with office. A sergeant in the army has authority over a private; a manager or supervisor has authority over those who are under him or her. A parent has certain authority over his child, and so forth. (Example: Ahab and Jezebel ruled as tyrants for 22 years simply because they had the title and clout to do what they wanted.)

**Power of situation.** While positional power is the formal mechanism for allocating power, circumstances also have a way of putting power into our hands. (Example: Jacob and Esau. Jacob used Esau’s hunger to give Jacob situational power to get the birthright he wanted.)

The Old Testament law made it extremely difficult for a person to take advantage of someone else. Study the following texts:

- Exodus 22:25–27  
- Deuteronomy 15:1, 2
- Leviticus 25:8–17  
- Deuteronomy 15:12–15
- Deuteronomy 15:7–11

**Power of competence.** In a situation that demands expertise, we tend to defer to someone with education and experience in that particular field. And the expert can either aid or exploit the situation with his power. (Example: For centuries people believed that Aristotle was right when he
Naboth’s Vineyard

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

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

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

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

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

**Think about how easy it is to use religion to exploit people. How might you have been tempted to use faith to push people to do what you want? Why must we be very careful not to allow ourselves to fall into that trap?**
said that the heavier an object, the faster it would fall to earth. Aristotle was regarded as the greatest thinker of all time, and surely he would not be wrong. It was not until centuries later that his theory was finally tested—and proved wrong!

**Power of personality and character.** There are many ways that one can have the upper hand in a situation by playing on the psyche of another. It could be using physical attractiveness as a lure, tears for sympathy, body language for assertiveness, empty threats to get results, pretending to be helpless to get someone else to do the job, etc. (Example: Delilah used her hold on Samson as power to bring down a nation.)

**Conclusion:** While Ahab and Jezebel are examples of how we should not use power, Joseph is an example of how we can use power. Although Joseph’s feigned harshness produced fear, it was his graciousness that resulted in spiritual awareness and the beginnings of repentance. The gruff accusations of Joseph did produce the facts he sought about his father and brother (see Gen. 42:8–13), but it was grace that caused his brothers to consider their circumstances as coming from the hand of God.

▶ **STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

**Thought Questions:**
What are some of the selfish gains that result from abuse of power (money, influence, prestige, control) in everyday situations? How can we exercise whatever power we have at our disposal? Do we use it to serve others or to seek our own selfish ends?

▶ **STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?
The End Comes . . .

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

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

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

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

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

In what immediate ways have you been impacted by the sins of others? What biblical principles, and promises, can you claim to help alleviate the damage done?
Power of any kind can be a temptation, a test of a Christian’s stewardship. Is how you combat the temptation of power done in the same way you fight any other kind of temptation? Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose-Driven Life*, gives four ways to defeat temptation:

- Refocus your attention on something else.
- Reveal your struggle to a godly friend or support group.
- Resist the devil.
- Realize your vulnerability.


Consider the following activities to keep you from abusing power: When you find yourself in the middle of a disagreement or conflict, deliberately take time to pray and then look at the situation from the other person’s perspective. Deliberately fight your natural instinct to justify your point of view. Practice humility with the help of the Holy Spirit.
**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Exercise Authority With Humility,” p. 215, in *The Adventist Home*.

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

**Discussion Questions:**

1. In many ways this week’s lesson was a lesson about the use of power. What are the privileges that come with power? What are the dangers? As a class, talk about the kind of power that comes specifically with religion. What particular dangers must be avoided in the wielding of the power associated with religion? Why can this kind of power be the most dangerous, if abused? How can we as a church help protect ourselves and others from this kind of abuse?

2. Another lesson we can gather from this week’s study deals with influence. In class, talk about the kind of influences we have as individuals and as a church. What can we do to make sure that our influence is as positive as possible, both in the world and in the church?

3. Think about the first impression of your local church. Put yourself in the position of a first-time visitor. What kind of impression do you think your church makes? What kind of impression do you think your church makes? What are the strong points? What are the weak points? What can you do as a class to help make that first impression as good as it can be?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 22.
Hosea and Gomer

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Key Text:** Hosea 3:1, NIV

**Teach the Class to:**
- **Know:** God seeks, redeems, and saves the lost.
- **Feel:** The love that God feels for us.
- **Do:** Draw the backslider through true Christian love.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. An Unusual Request (Hos. 1:2)

- Bible names often reveal character. Gomer is described as a child of whoredoms. This may refer to her ancestry or to her future downfall. It also may mean “completion.” Like Gomer, we’ve all fallen. Yet, how does Gomer’s name hint that, despite our past, God woos us back to Him? How does He complete us?

- Expectant parents spend hours picking out names. Perhaps Hosea chooses Beeri after his father. Or maybe Gomer wants Diblaim after hers. God gives their child a name that means “scattered.” It would serve as a living warning of the future to those who heard it. What living warnings does God use to get our attention today?

II. A Question of Paternity (Hos. 2:7, 8)

- An American sports idiom used to boast about victory is “Who’s your daddy?” It equates one’s victory over an opponent with the power that a father wields over his children. But this takes on quite literal meaning in the case of Gomer, whose children’s paternity is in question. Is our Paternity in question? If the world asked “Who’s your daddy?” how would your life reveal that God is your Father?

- Gomer, a symbol of Israel, wasted her life with Baal lovers. Notice God’s response to her adultery. “Behold, I will allure her” (Hos. 2:14). The language of redemption here is that of love. How does God “allure” us back to Him today?

III. Love That Never Fails (Hos. 3:1–3)

Hosea redeems Gomer for 15 pieces of silver, plus one and one-half homers of barley. It’s enough for Hosea to buy back her life. How does Jesus’ blood make our worth incalculable and buy us back from sin?

**Summary:** God embraces us fully when we return to Him.
Gomer’s Unfaithfulness

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

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, Why is this lesson important to me?

There is a story about a husband who finds his wife’s suicide note that asks the question, Can you forgive me? The story unfolds to reveal that she had an affair with her brother-in-law and chose death rather than the humiliation and shame of having her husband find out about it. For her, seeking forgiveness was not an option.

Many of us have skeletons in our closets, things we work very hard at keeping away from family, friends, and the church. But with our sins, there is no hiding from God. However, this should bring us comfort, not fear. God’s intimate knowledge of everything we do should make it easier to approach His throne of grace. Ask the class if there’s anyone bold enough to share their darkest, deepest secret with the rest of the class. Wait only for a brief, awkward moment before anyone responds and say something like, “Of course, I do not expect any eager volunteers. Many of us have skeletons in our closets, things we work very hard at keeping away from family, friends, the church. But with our sins, there is no place to hide them from God.”

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Hosea’s marriage is a picture of God’s relationship with Israel. Hosea’s choice of a prostitute was exactly like God’s choice of Israel and of us. The only thing that happens with regularity in the story of Hosea and Gomer is that he takes her back every time she returns; her repentance is short-lived, and she is off again with another new lover.

Only one who knows the love and forgiveness of God can ever love this perfectly. And one who has experienced His loving forgiveness cannot help but love and forgive others. Hosea is an outstanding biblical example of that kind of love.
Spiritual Adultery

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

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

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

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

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

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

None of us are immune to the temptations of spiritual adultery. What are some Bible texts that, if obeyed, could help protect us? Find the texts, write them down, and bring them to class on Sabbath. See, for instance, Phil. 4:8, Col. 2:6, 1 Pet. 4:1.
The entire message of Hosea can be summarized in Hosea 11:8, 9: “For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath” (NIV). When it comes to our sin and judgment, God does not treat us the way we treat one another; He treats us with mercy. The story of Hosea and Gomer emphasizes the kind of relationship God wants with us.

What separates us from God is not so much our sin but our refusal to accept His forgiveness. Like Gomer, our lives tell a recurring story of weakness, sin, failure, and betrayal. Like with those before us in the Bible (Moses, David, Jonah, Peter, etc.), God longs for us to leave our worldly ways and come back to Him.

Consider the reasons why we refuse to accept God’s forgiveness. Are some attitudes that keep us away worse than others? What was Israel’s attitude toward God’s open arms of forgiveness? Read the following texts from Hosea to get a sense of Israel’s attitude: 4:8, 17; 5:5; 7:10; 9:7; 11:2, 5, 7; 13:9; 14:4.

God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness far outweigh our worst sins. The litany of Israel’s sins consists of the worst, most vilest form of betrayal, deceit, and adultery. The kind of betrayal seen in Israel’s actions, and in Gomer’s, is not commonplace. But the extent of the deceit accentuates the mercy of God.

Consider: If God can be so forgiving of the worst sins, should we not be more supportive and accepting when a church member falls from grace? Why are some sins more difficult to forgive than others? What can we do to keep from being judgmental about the faults of others?

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Thought Questions:

1. The usual course of action when we find a loved one in sin is to shame and manipulate that person. This often brings the person back to right behavior. But what is more important than right behavior? What is the ultimate result of right behavior that’s not paired with a changed heart?

CONTINUED
Bearing the Fruit of Unfaithfulness

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

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

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

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

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

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

**What has been your own experience with God working to keep you close to Him?** How have you responded? **What changes do you need to make that will help you better respond to His prompting?**
Depending on the threshold of our comfort zone, our forgiveness has its limits. For some of us, forgiveness means thinking about the atrocity but without pain. That is, we forgive if we are no longer hurt by that person. To others, it means moving on with life just as long we do not have to see the offending person ever again. To still others, it means having a normal relationship once again with the concerned person and restoring trust once more. Why the different levels? Are all acts of forgiveness? Does God always expect forgiveness to result in complete restoration of a relationship? Explain.

Application Questions:

The word *compassion* means feeling with or shared emotions. When you approach someone with compassion, you cannot stand on the outside with a finger pointing at him. You need to step inside his circle of shame and hold him without reservation. In what ways does your church do this? What positive changes can we make in our church life to be more compassionate?

Witnessing

What is your responsibility toward a church member who you know is having difficulty with a particular temptation? When Nathan approached David about his affair with Bathsheba, he began by sharing a parable (see 2 Sam. 12:1–14).

What lessons can we learn from Nathan about approaching someone with the intention to help? What lessons of confrontation, intervention, and intercession can we learn from Nathan?

**STEP 4—Apply!**

*Just for Teachers:* In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Have the class meditate on the hymn “Just As I Am” and Ephesians 3:18–20. Then have members come up with a bumper sticker slogan or
Amazing Love

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Are you where you should be in terms of your relationship with the Lord? Have you committed spiritual adultery? What hope can you draw from the message that God has given us through these chapters?**
newspaper headline that shouts out in praise the awesomeness of God’s forgiveness.

Encourage your class to develop into better forgivers by applying one of these suggestions:
• Read Psalm 139 in your favorite version. Then follow David’s example and invite God to help you unearth all the buried sins of your past and fill it with His grace and love.
• Make a list of people you need to sort things out with about hurts and offenses. Then pray every day for these people and your feelings toward them until you feel the Spirit’s comforting presence, and go set things right!

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

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

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, go over the Bible verses you used to answer the question at the end of Tuesday’s lesson. What practical principles can you take from these texts that can help us, as individuals and as a church, to protect ourselves from spiritual adultery?

2. As a class, talk about what you believe the basic message found in these few chapters in Hosea is. What is the Lord telling us as a church today through this story? What lessons should we not draw from it?

3. Are there some church members who have fallen away? As a class, make an effort to contact these people, to show them that you care about them and that you are interested in them. In what ways can you show them the kind of grace and mercy that God has revealed to us through this story?

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

SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 29.
The Beginning of the Relationship

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

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

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

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

vss. 3, 4

vss. 5–7

vss. 8–12

vs. 13

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

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

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

**Key Text:** Isaiah 54:5

**Teach the Class to:**

**Know:** God has a covenant with His people.

**Feel:** The joy of drawing closer to Jesus.

**Do:** Restore, through faith, their relationship with God and others.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Marriage as a Metaphor (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 2:2, 32)

A. For review: How is marriage, as a metaphor, illustrated in Hosea’s life? When he took back his unfaithful wife, what did this show Israel? What does this show us that God is prepared to do for us when we stray from Him?

B. God instructs Jeremiah never to marry. Ezekiel’s wife dies suddenly. Hosea marries an adulterous woman and takes her and her children back. Each of these prophets goes beyond preaching God’s message but becomes it by enduring adulterous marriage, celibacy, and the death of a spouse. What does your life preach to the world?

II. Marriage Vows Violated (Jer. 5:7, Hos. 4:7)

A. Why is marriage such an effective comparison for describing Israel’s relationship with God?

B. In every covenant there are promises. What promises does God make to ancient Israel? What relevance do they have for us today?

III. Fulfillment Beyond Failure (Jer. 31:31–37)

A. In many cultures, when wives marry they traditionally give up their surname and take their husband’s surname. What does it mean to be called by God’s name, and how do we keep from taking this name in vain?

B. It was God’s plan for Israel to set an example of national greatness to attract the attention of other people who would “cleave to the house of Jacob” (Isa. 14:1). Why didn’t Israel break away from idols, cling to God, and convert the whole world? How can modern Israel avoid the same mistake? What things must the church cling to and break away from? Why?

**Summary:** God desires that we remain faithful in love to Him and to our husbands and wives.
Unfaithfulness of the Bride

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

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

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

Jer. 5:7

Ezek. 16:26–29, 34

Hos. 9:1

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

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

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

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

STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, Why is this lesson important to me?

Divorce is commonplace in many societies. Reasons for divorce range from leaving the toilet seat up (in the United States) to being a left-handed wife (in Japan) to not giving your wife coffee (in Saudi Arabia). In most places, divorce is getting easier to obtain. But that does not diminish the powerful metaphor of marriage applied to God’s relationship with the church.

God does not enter into a trial relationship with the church, He does not bail out when things do not go as planned, and He has no alternative relationship in place. His commitment to His church is forever.

STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

The metaphor of newlyweds applied to God and the church works best not only when we look to God as our Husband but when we live as His new bride. To do this, we must remember the power of His unconditional love. There are many tender references throughout His Word to describe His feelings toward His bride, the church.

Consider This: Find some of these references in the Bible.

His love for His bride moves God to do three things:

1. God pursues His bride: From the beginning, God has taken the first move. He will always pursue us relentlessly (1 Kings 6:13, Ps. 132:13, John 15:13, Rev. 3:20).
Reaping the Fruits of Unfaithfulness

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

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

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

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

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

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

What has been your own experience with the protections and safety that come from obedience? What lessons have you been forced to learn the hard way?
God protects His bride. Even before the fall of humanity, God in His infinite love had a backup plan to save us from the enemy. He will stop at nothing to protect us (see Zeph. 3:17).

God purifies His bride: God is not interested in a temporary relationship. He wants us forever. So, He makes us heaven-ready through the Cross. He makes it possible for us to have a relationship with Him on earth, as well as in heaven. Through the Cross, He gave us the ultimate love-gift: His life, that we may be purified and be one with Him forever (see Titus 2:13, 14).

God plays the role of the Groom with perfection. What should be the church’s response as His bride?

Our lesson this week dwells on the metaphor of a groom and his bride used to describe God and His church. Based on this fact, what is our role as church members?

Perhaps it would do us well to look to another metaphor within the culture of Jesus’ time to understand our role. The church member can be likened to the friend of the groom. Consider the responsibilities of the friend of the groom. The friend played a distinct role. He took care of all the arrangements, he delivered the invitations, and he even guarded the bridal chamber. His job was to ensure that the wedding took place, and his loyalty was to the couple. He made sure nothing got in the way of the happy union.

Church members are the friend of the groom, with a direct responsibility to make the relationship between God and the church body work in the way it was meant to. You cannot be a friend of the groom by limiting your involvement to the divine service hour as a passive participant in the pew. Your role needs to be active.

In this role every church member needs to
• build and support his or her church community,
• promote God’s good intentions and desires for His bride,
• invite people to experience God, and
• protect the reputation of the bride.

Divide your class into four groups to develop a doable plan to accomplish one of the four tasks of the friend of the groom.
Restoration

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

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

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

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

The prophets urged Israel to return to Yahweh, promising that He would be faithful in accepting them back. They were confident that Israel would return, but the restoration of the relationship can rest only on one condition—that God’s people in returning to Him should abandon their idolatrous ways, obey His commands, and rely completely on Yahweh again.
Finally, a bride glows from basking in the love of her groom. She reflects the difference her new union has made. The church is called to do the same.

STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: How can I practice the information I just learned?

Thought Questions:
God and the church are compared to the relationship between a groom and his bride—not a master and his slave, a boss and his secretary, or even two best friends. What makes the relationship between a groom and his bride different from the rest is intimacy. What are the elements of your church that speak of intimacy with God? What can you do as a church body to increase the level of intimacy?

Application Questions:
One of the natural results of being loving and being loved is joy. Therefore it is only natural to expect Christians to be joyous. Why, then, are there so many joyless Christians? What, if anything, does the focus on doing right for God instead of living in the Lord have to do with joylessness?

STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

Why do churches have so many people on their membership rolls who give little or no evidence of Christian commitment or even conversion? Why do many churches find it difficult to motivate members to give, serve, pray, and share their faith? The answer is that members were allowed to join with no expectations placed on them. You get what you ask for.
New Covenant Promises

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

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

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

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

Have you played the harlot? Have you spurned God’s love? His words to you are, “Come back! I will heal and forgive.” The question now is, What is your response?
“Paul mentions two different types of commitment in 2 Corinthians 8:5 (GNB): First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God’s will, they gave themselves to us as well. . . . We call these the first-base commitments. You commit yourself to Christ for salvation and then you commit yourself to other Christians for membership. . . . We define koinonia (fellowship) as ‘being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ.’ ”—Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan), p. 319.

Rick Warren explains how his church requires new members to join a membership class and encourages new members to make a membership covenant that binds them to an active involvement in the church. It is easy to get so involved in everyday life that church involvement gets left by the wayside.

What if the church were to replace your title in the church from church member to minister or disciple? Would this make you feel comfortable or not? Explain. As a class write a job description for church members.

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

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, talk more about the question of how sin causes people to do irrational and reckless things. How is it that people who know better nevertheless allow themselves to be swept away by their passions? What can we do, if anything, to help someone we see heading down that path?

2. Talk about the idea of God’s law being a protection. What does that mean? How does it protect us? What does it protect us from? At the same time, too, why is faithfulness to the law and to the principles of living that God has given us no guarantee that we will not suffer?

3. Wednesday’s lesson talked about the joy, happiness, and peace that come from being in a saving relationship with our Lord. Talk about just what it is about serving the Lord that brings joy, happiness, and peace. Let each member share his or her own experiences. Seek to learn from each other. Why, in a world full of idols (in whatever form they come), is it important to focus on the blessings and good things that we have been given as children of God?

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