Welcome

Welcome to the experience of teaching from Cornerstone Connections: Real. Solid. Stories.

The following are provided for your assistance:

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A WORD ABOUT WHAT’S AHEAD . . . (student introduction)

The goal of Cornerstone Connections is to lead you to the Bible to see the big story of God and people. This big story continues from the first generation in Eden to your generation today. It’s about the lives of people as the God of the universe interacts with them.

If you are looking for a word from God that is real, Cornerstone Connections captures the message of Scripture and challenges you to make the connections to your real life.

God’s Word is not only real; it is rock-solid. For the first generation to hear God’s voice in the garden to the last group standing before Christ at the Second Coming, the Word of God has been and continues to be reliable.

The word from God comes to us in the stories of people who encountered Him and made a decision to either follow Him or walk away.

Real. Solid. Stories. You will find one in Into the Story in each lesson. Out of the Story will provide you with ways to search for truth you can apply to your life. In each lesson you also will find:

• What Do You Think? — a mental activity to get your mind and heart in gear for the story to follow. Every time you approach a Bible story, you are coming to it in the context of the story in which you live every day.
• Did You Know? — a brief statistic or definition that digs a little deeper into the story or simply provides some helpful facts to bring to the lesson.
• Key Text — a verse that points out a key concept from the story. It is also a great place to find verses that you can memorize and store away for later use.
• Punch Lines — a few other verses from Scripture that punctuate key concepts of the lesson. You may see connections between them and the Bible story as well as your own life.
• Flashlight — a brief snapshot of Ellen White’s input on the story. These glimmers that shed light onto the biblical passage will also give you a glimpse of what awaits you in the suggested weekly reading from her inspired commentary on the stories—The Conflict of the Ages.*
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Israel’s long journey in the desert resulted from failing to trust God’s word when the way seemed impossible. The 40-year trek in the desert offers a wealth of stories recounting the unmistakable care God gave to His children. The stories of this journey would be an inspiration were it not for the tragic moments when Israel stalled in disbelief. In this lesson we pick up the story where the children of God face the almost charted territory of their parents who, unfortunately, were almost faithful.

As they passed through the lands of ungodly enemies the children of Israel are tempted to view adversity solely from a human perspective. Forty years prior the children of God failed to believe and obey God’s direction and were sent back into the desert to learn the lessons of faith. Would this new generation repeat the disbelief of their parents? This week’s story brings us to another pivotal point in Israel’s journey.

But Israel’s experience is not just a story about an ancient people; it foreshadows our story today. The tipping point when we choose to trust or not trust God’s Word is a point every believer faces in life. The test is to believe and trust God’s Word in impossible situations. Sometimes all it takes is a reminder of the guiding ways of God to give you enough faith to enter into the uncharted territory of God’s will.

When we lack the faith to obey God, He does not shield us from similar tests in the future; in fact, God brings us to places where we must test our trust in Him again. When we face obstacles, we need to remember that the challenges we face only appear to be impossible. But with each faithful step we are fortified to face any challenge because we have personally experienced God’s faithfulness.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Understand the core elements of trusting God to do the seemingly impossible. (Know)
• Sense the trustworthiness of God and His Word. (Feel)
• Choose to seize moments that test their faith as opportunities to grow instead of calamities to avoid. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Perseverance
• Trust
• Learning from failure/mistakes

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity
Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.
Illustration
Share this illustration in your own words:

The story is told of Houdini, the skilled locksmith and sensational magician who often boasted of being able to break out of any jail cell providing he could go in with his everyday clothes and have complete privacy. A small town in England boasted of the new jail cell they built, claiming that no one could escape. The small town invited Houdini to give their jail cell a try, and he accepted the challenge.

They ushered him into the cell in his street clothes and left him alone to try and make his escape. Houdini removed his belt that concealed a flexible rod that he used to try and pick the lock. After hours of trying, the Great Houdini fell against the cell door. The door swung open, and he landed on the cold stone floor. The great escape artist did not realize that the door was unlocked the whole time he was trying to break free.

Sometimes we insist on doing things our way first, only to find a better way was there all along. But compare Houdini with Seo Sang-moon and examine how their approach to obstacles is similar, and how it is different.

Seventy-year-old Seo Sang-moon determined to pass his driver’s examination. Located in a rural section of South Korea, he took an oral examination to ascertain whether or not he knew the rules of driving. The old man did not know how to read, which is why he used the trial and error method for getting the right answers. He spent more than a thousand dollars in fees to take the test over and over again. He took the test 272 times before he managed to learn all the wrong answers. To his credit, he persevered. Now Seo Sang-moon needs to pass only the road test—hopefully he will try another method.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story
Share the following in your own words:

Sometimes we can be like Houdini and stubbornly face our challenges with only human solutions. Seo Sang-moon is similar in that he saw the only option was to learn the hard way. As we read this story we see Israel faced with a faith situation. Read the whole story and examine the passage in the Into the Story section and see what you can learn about trusting God’s ways when you are uncertain.

Out of the Story for Teachers
After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- Underline the specific commands God gives the children of Israel in this story.
- What promises does God make to the children in this story?
- Circle the different people and people groups in this story.
- What is significant about the way God describes the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites as “brothers”?
- Why do you think God made the Israelites wander and wait 38 years before coming back to this pivotal point of decision about the Promised Land again?
- What words or phrases in this story do you think are key to understanding God’s guidance and our faithfulness to His Word?
- What do you think is the central lesson taught in this story?
- How do you think the Israelites felt faced with the same challenge the previous generation failed to achieve?
- Read the entire story (Deuteronomy 2; 3:1-11). Given that it ends in victory, how would you title the entire story so that it captures the challenge and result of their faithfulness?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Luke 5:1-6; Exodus 4:1-12; Proverbs 3:5.

Sharing Context and Background
Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Background. It is critical to remember that the book of Deuteronomy is predominantly a public discourse given by Moses to the children of Israel, and mostly to those who had been born in the desert. The older generation had failed to trust fully in God’s power and had not believed at a pivotal moment in their journey. They were rerouted to wander for 38 years and learn to trust and obey God’s guiding ways. Now, the current generation camps for two months, and Moses reminds them of where they have been, what God has said, and what He promises to do on behalf of His children. The events leading up to the conquest of Bashan
and the victory itself mark a lesson of faith learned by the children of God.

There are several key angles of this story to discuss with the class. The Out of the Story section sets the tone and the direction of the oncoming events. It might be helpful to have the students read the entire section (Deuteronomy 2; 3:1-11).

1. One angle in this story depicts a gentle, tightrope walk of diplomacy between the children of Israel and the tribes that stood in the way of their getting to the Promised Land. God’s direct command was:
   a. “They will be afraid of you, but be very careful . . .” In a way, God is saying, “There does not need to be any bloodshed, so don’t make any sudden moves as you move through their land.” This cautious and civil approach is a theme as they journey. They were supposed to “buy food” and “buy water” and ensure the inhabitants that they were not going to inhabit that territory.
   b. God had promised Esau his own land, and even though his descendants chose to live outside of a relationship with God, God honored His word to them. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary states: “God deals faithfully even with those outside of the covenant relationship. God had promised certain temporal blessings to the descendants of Esau, and would fulfill His word” (vol. 1, p. 961). Perhaps it would be appropriate to ask of the students, “How does God want us to relate to people who live in total opposition to the Christian faith?”

2. Another angle to pursue with the class might be the significant size of the Israelites’ enemies. In Deuteronomy 2:20 and 3:11 there is reference to the Rephaim, or the giants. These giants are compared to the Anakites because of their size, and given the size of the king’s iron bed, they might have stood up to 13 feet tall.

**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Pair-a-phrase**

Reading Scripture is not always the most engaging of activities for youth because the words and phrases are so familiar. Sometimes it helps to challenge them to rewrite a passage in their own words without using any of the original words (except to, it, the, and, etc.). Compound the value of the exercise by having the students pair up, making individual paraphrases, then making one together. Invite the students to report their paraphrases and make sure you affirm them, noting the insights that they have expressed. As a result, the students truly process the meaning of the passage to arrive at their own take on the verse.

**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
The ultimate lesson from this story is that the children of Israel obeyed God’s guiding words and found that God works sometimes diplomacy, and other times through more aggressive ways. Either way, God’s way yields victory.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

One of the chief lessons of this story is the wisdom of learning from the mistakes of those who have gone before you. Invite an older person to respond to the following interview questions: Would you please share an example of learning from someone’s positive example? Would you please share an example of how you learned from someone’s mistake? If there were one piece of advice you would give a young person about trusting God in uncertain times, what would it be?

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The children that were born in the desert had to know about their parents’ failure to trust God as they approached the Promised Land. Perhaps they heard stories or remembered songs that captured the sadness and made them determined to trust God to deliver, protect, and prosper His people. The challenge doesn’t get any easier the older you get. God will always bring us to the land of the giants where our only hope is in Him. Our duty is linked to our destiny—to be victorious by God’s hand, not our own. Remember the words of Solomon who said, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5, 6, NIV). Just look at the track record God has in being both faithful and amazing as you face obstacles and adversity. The challenges may seem like giants to us, but God is undefeated.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 39.

*A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about Beginning of the End at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
the trust test

flashlight

“Everyone who seeks to follow the path of duty will at times be assailed by doubt and unbelief. The way will sometimes be so barred by obstacles, apparently insurmountable, as to dishearten those who will yield to discouragement; but God is saying to such, Go forward. Do your duty at any cost. The difficulties that seem so formidable, that fill your soul with dread, will vanish as you move forward in the path of obedience, humbly trusting in God” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 437).

key text

“The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.”

(Deuteronomy 2:7, NIV)
Voting: Indicate whether you agree (A) or disagree (B) with the following statements and be ready to explain why.

___ God expects us to be 100 percent certain before we step out and choose to obey Him.

___ God expects us to follow Him with blind faith in His leading.

___ God expects us to use reason and facts to make our decisions about His will.

Either/Or

Which do you think is a more effective way to learn: learning from others' mistakes or from their good example? Choose one and explain your reasons. Think of an example.

____

____

did you know?

Several groups of big people are referred to in the Bible:

Nephilim—existed very early in human history;

Rephaim—occupied the land prior to the Canaanites;

Anakim—lived in the south, near Hebron and were defeated by the Israelites under Joshua;

Emim—a warrior tribe of giants that were defeated by Chedorlaomer and his allies around the time of Abraham (see Numbers 13:33; Deuteronomy 2:10, 11; 3:11).

How big were the giants the Israelites faced? Moses says, “We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (Numbers 13:33, NIV). Why might Moses have exaggerated?

In any case, the enemy was unmistakably large, making the miracle of God’s victory equally large.

“Then we turned back and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea, as the Lord had directed me. For a long time we made our way around the hill country of Seir. Then the Lord said to me, ‘You have made your way around this hill country long enough; now turn north.

“Give the people these orders: ‘You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, but be very careful. Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot on. I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own. You are to pay the Arabs in silver for the food you eat and the water you drink.'”

“The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything. So we went on past our brothers the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. We turned from the Arabah road, which comes up from Elath and Ezion Geber, and traveled along the desert road of Moab.

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Do not harass the Moabites or provoke them to war, for I will not give you any part of their land. I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession.’ (The Emites used to live there—a people strong and numerous, and as tall as the Anakites. Like the Anakites, they too were considered Rephaites, but the Moabites called them Emites. Horites used to live in Seir, but the descendants of Esau drove them out. They destroyed the Horites from before them and settled in their place, just as Israel did in the land the Lord gave them as their possession.)

“And the Lord said, ‘Now get up and cross the Zered Valley.' So we crossed the valley. Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them.”

(Deuteronomy 2:1-14, NIV)
OUT OF THE STORY

What specific commands does God give the children of Israel in the story? Underline them.

What promises does God make to the children in this story?

What words or phrases in this story are key?

Circle the different people or people groups in this story.

Before entering the Promised Land, why do you think God made the Israelites wander and wait 38 years before coming back to this pivotal point?

What do you think is the central lesson taught in this story?

Underline what you think is the most important phrase or verse in this story.

How do you think the Israelites felt when faced with the challenge that their forefathers had failed 40 years before?

punch lines

“Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it . . . but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (Hebrews 4:1, 2, NIV).

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Psalms 20:7, NIV).

“I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13, NIV).

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8, 9, NIV).

“And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you” (Psalm 9:10, NRSV).

“In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them” (Psalm 22:4, NIV).

“Faith is like muscle which grows stronger and stronger with use, rather than rubber, which weakens when it is stretched.”—J. O. Fraser, 20th-century Scottish missionary in China.

“To become a Christian is not to adopt a different belief system. To become a Christian is to experience a transformation into the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Admitting is useless without committing.”

Sunday

Read the story of how Israel was led back through the land of the giants. Pay special attention to Deuteronomy 2:7. With what spirit do you think Israel was to journey through the lands of their enemies? As you read this entire section in Deuteronomy 2 and 3, what theme do you pick up as Israel was challenged again to face such a seemingly impossible task?

What are some challenges you face today that you sense God is asking you to trust Him with?

Monday

The Key Text this week is Deuteronomy 2:7, which conveys a beautiful reminder of God’s enduring care for Israel during a season when they were to learn what it means to lean fully on God’s guidance. Paraphrase this passage in your own words, not using any of the major terms or phrases that the Bible uses. Try to capture the essence of this verse as if the message were given to you personally.

Tuesday

The Flashlight passage from Patriarchs and Prophets contains a reality check, an assurance, and a command that will test your ability to trust God completely with your life. Identify the reality check, the assurance, and the command and reflect on the parts that speak to you personally.

Wednesday

Reflect on the heroes of faith in your life. Perhaps they are church members, or historical or biblical characters that have been an inspiration to you. Which faith hero can you hear passionately proclaiming the words of the Flashlight quote with conviction and experience?

Thursday

It is sometimes said, “The devil is in the details,” but so is God. On a piece of paper or in a journal, make a list of the many events in your life when you trusted God and He was faithful. List the big things as well as the small things, or the details. As you consider how God has led you in the past, what new challenges do you want to trust Him with in the future? Imagine that each challenge is like knocking on the door of the giants.

List at the top of a piece of paper the upcoming opportunities you will have to lean fully on God. Beneath, write out a prayer thankfully mentioning a few of the pivotal moments of faith you have already experienced and commit your future to God, no matter where He might lead you. Think of at least three areas of your life in which you want to follow God explicitly and include them in your prayer.

Friday

Take some time and think about some of the more challenging leaps of faith that you remember people taking in Scripture. It may be that some, like the children of Israel, can better liken their journey to a roller-coaster ride going up and down with success and failure. To what would you liken your journey or your relationship with God? If you could change anything about your relationship with God, what would it be?

this week’s reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 39.

*A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

When a pagan king saw the Israelites he was afraid and sent messengers to Balaam to put a supernatural curse on them. Balaam, though, pretended to have great integrity and told them no amount of money would get him to do that. Balaam was once a good man, a prophet of God even, but he had fallen away from the Lord and had given himself up to covetousness and greed. Yet he still professed to be a servant of the Most High.

Balaam knew about God’s miraculous work in behalf of Israel, and when the messengers announced their errand (to get him to curse Israel) he well knew that it was his duty to refuse the rewards of Balak and to dismiss the ambassadors. But he ventured to dally with temptation and urged the messengers to tarry with him that night, declaring that he could give no decided answer until he had asked counsel of the Lord. Deep down, though, he really wanted the money and he tempted God, all the while pretending to be pious. The Lord, of course, saw through Balaam’s deceit. What follows next is a funny and yet at the same time sobering account of how the Lord dealt with the wayward man, a story that includes—among other things—a talking donkey. From this story we learn about how greed and covetousness can blind us to our true selves.

When you teach the lesson you might also point out that animal abuse is a sin (see Prov.12:10; Ps. 36:6; 147:9). Make sure the students know that animals are innocent but suffer in this world of sin, too. We should make their time on earth as bearable as possible. Help the students realize how wrong it was for Balaam to strike the donkey. When the Angel of the Lord came to kill Balaam, the donkey turned away, thus saving Balaam from death.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Know the consequences of pride and turning away from God.
• Feel God’s power and know that, with Him, you cannot hide your self-righteousness, because He knows the heart.
• Respond by understanding that if they become immune to sin, they will go down the path of the unrighteous.

III. EXPLORE

• The will of God
• Materialism/worldliness
• Abuse

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity
Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.
Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Imagine that a man was walking through the woods and spotted a bag of gems, gold, jewelry, and money. This man was homeless, hadn’t eaten in a long time, and was weak. He knew that he would die if he didn’t have food. But even though he was starving, he refused to take the bag because it didn’t belong to him. So he walked into town to try to find an odd job in order to get some food. The man didn’t know it, but someone had observed him in the woods. His honesty had reached the ears of people in the town. Everyone had great admiration for this man for doing the right thing, so he easily got a job to pay for food.

After a while, it was discovered that the bag of wealth belonged to a very rich man. The town thought that the wealthy man should give the poor man some of his money to honor him for not stealing. But the rich man didn’t want to. He didn’t care that the man respected him enough to not steal, but he knew that if he didn’t give this man some money, he would appear selfish. So he gave the man some of the gold from the bag. He acted happy to be doing it for the man, but in his heart he was reluctant. Now, because of the rich man’s “generosity,” the people honored him more, not knowing that his heart was not in it.

In the end, both men did the “right” thing, but for different reasons.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Just like Balaam, the rich man did what everyone else thought was right, but his heart wasn’t in the right place. Balaam told the Moabites he would not curse Israel, but not because he wanted to do the right thing. He just wanted to appear righteous. The rich man in this story did the same thing. He didn’t care about the poor man; he cared about himself and how he would look.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• What was Balaam’s feeling about the Moabites and the Israelites?
• Why did the Moabites desperately desire for Balaam to curse the Israelites?
• Why did Balaam refuse to go with the Moabites?
• What are some of the main lessons we can learn from the story?
• Why did Balaam so mercilessly strike the donkey that he rode?
• In what way did the abused donkey save Balaam’s life?
• What parts of this story stand out to you?
• What were some of the reasons that Balaam turned away from God?
• Why did God send the Angel of the Lord to slay Balaam as he rode to Moab?
• Do you ever want to do the “right” thing for the wrong reason?
• Is it better to do the wrong thing for the right reason, or to do the right thing for the wrong reason?
• Who was the source of Balaam’s greed and covetousness?
• Why did Balaam refuse to curse the Israelites when the servants of Moab asked him to?
• Compare ways in which Balaam was covetous with ways that we are sometimes covetous today. What similarities are there? What differences?
• How did Balaam appear to hide his true heart from God?
• What are some ways in which you try to hide your true self from God?

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

“Midianites. The Midianites are a people living in the southern portions of the Transjordan region. They are described as the descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:1-6) and operate as traders and caravaneers in the Joseph narrative (Genesis 37:25-36). Moses joins the Midianite clan of Jethro after fleeing Egypt, but the Midianites do not join the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan. In the Balaam narrative, the Midianite elders are allied with the Moabites and participate in the hiring of the prophet to curse Israel.”—Bible Background Commentary

“Balaam at Deir Allah. In 1967 a Dutch archaeo-
logical expedition led by H. J. Franken discovered some inscribed pieces of plaster at a site in Jordan known as Deir ‘Allah. The fragments are apparently written in Aramaic and date to about 850 B.C. They mention Balaam son of Beor, the same figure described as a ‘seer’ in Numbers 22–24. Although the text is very fragmentary, with many breaks and uncertain words, it can be established that Balaam was a seer who received a divine message during the night and that his message was not what his neighbors expected to hear. Whether this text refers to the events described in the Bible is questionable, but it does establish a nonbiblical tradition current in the ninth century of a prophet named Balaam. It may be that Balaam’s notoriety was such that he remained an important prophetic figure for centuries and could thus be identified with the earlier Israelite narratives of the conquest.”—Bible Background Commentary

“Prophetic status of Balaam. In Joshua 13:22, Balaam is described as a ‘soothsayer,’ while in Numbers 22:6 he is said to be a man whose blessings and curses are effective. He is from the region of upper Mesopotamia, near Carchemish, and has an international reputation as a true prophet. Throughout the narrative in Numbers 22–24, Balaam continually reminds Balak that he can speak only the words which God gives him to speak (Numbers 22:18, 38; 23:12, 26; 24:13). Although Balaam uses sacrificial rituals to obtain God’s answer, he is not to be considered simply a diviner. Divination, while sometimes used by Mesopotamian prophets, is more often associated with cultic personnel who examine sacrificial animals or natural conditions (flights of birds, etc.). In each case, Balaam seems to have direct communication with God and then speaks God’s word in the form of oracles to Balak. This is the typical form of prophetic address found in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and other Israelite prophets. Spoken oracles are also recorded in over fifty Mari texts (a few centuries earlier

Teaching From . . .
Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• Other Eyes
Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

• Flashlight
Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

• Punch Lines
Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

Tips for Top-notch Teaching
Safe Sharing
It is important that each student have an opportunity to participate. Even if a student is very uncomfortable speaking out loud, opportunities can be given for thinking and writing things down. Even if the student chooses not to share, he or she will have engaged in the process of thinking and applying.

In this lesson the students might be asked to write down sinful actions in everyday life to which it is easy for one’s conscience to become immune (e.g., cheating on tests, speaking disrespectfully to parents, etc.), and then fold their papers. Read the papers from the front and let students comment from their perspective. Even if a shy student does not say anything, their input has contributed to the overall discussion.
than Balaam, about 250 miles downstream from Carchemish). Through either lay people or temple personnel, various messages are offered to Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, from various deities. Therefore it is clear that prophetic activity in the ancient Near East during this general time period was not uncommon.”—Bible Background Commentary

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have the students make a list of three different ways that greed can control us, and three ways to keep greed from overpowering us. Then ask them to share their lists and discuss together ways in which they could apply what has been discussed in their everyday lives.

Conclude with ideas from the summary below, making sure that the lessons you have drawn and discussed from this lesson are clear.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The story of Balaam is about how greed can turn you away from God. It shows us that even though Balaam was once a righteous man, once he started down the wrong path it was easier and easier to continue. And, even though the devil controlled him, he still tried to make it appear as if he did the right thing by not cursing the Israelites—just so he could look righteous. But God knows the heart. There is nothing we can hide and there is nothing we should hide from God. To try would be useless. He sees our every move, but even when we sin He will always forgive us when we allow the Holy Spirit to bring us to genuine repentance.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 40.

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flashlight

“Balaam ‘loved the wages of unrighteousness’ (2 Peter 2:15). The sin of covetousness, which God declares to be idolatry, had made him a timeserver, and through this one fault Satan gained entire control of him. It was this that caused his ruin. The tempter is ever presenting worldly gain and honor to entice men from the service of God. He tells them it is their overconscientiousness that keeps them from prosperity. Thus many are induced to venture out of the path of strict integrity. One wrong step makes the next easier, and they become more and more presumptuous” (Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 439, 440).

keytext

“Then the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face.”

(Numbers 22:31, NKJV)
Desperate for money, a young man held up a store, even though his conscience told him it was wrong. Before long he committed more and more crimes, and the more he committed, the less it bothered him. The more wrong he did, the less wrong it seemed. He finally became completely immune to his guilt over the thievery.

Why did the young man become immune to his guilt?

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“Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff.

“Then the Lord opened the donkey’s mouth, and she said to Balaam, ‘What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?’

“Balaam answered the donkey, ‘You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.’

“The donkey said to Balaam, ‘Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?’

“No,’ he said. Then the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. The angel of the Lord asked him, ‘Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her.’

“Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, ‘I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back.’ The angel of the Lord said to Balaam, ‘Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you.’ So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.”

(Numbers 22:20-35, NIV)
“O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness” (Jeremiah 51:13, KJV).

“Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!” (Habakkuk 2:9, KJV).

“But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication” (Revelation 2:14, KJV).

“Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core” (Jude 11, KJV).

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5, KJV).

“Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction.” —Erich Fromm, 20th-century U.S. (German-born) psychoanalyst.

“Greed is a fat demon with a small mouth and whatever you feed it is never enough.” —Janwillem van de Wetering, current Dutch author.

“The main source of our wealth is goodness. The affections and the generous qualities that God admires in a world full of greed.” —Alfred A. Montapert, current U.S. author.
Sabbath

Do you see yourself as being more like Balaam, or more like the donkey, when it comes to relating to God?

Ponder your actions. Consider whether or not you do things that you once thought were sinful, but now believe to be harmless. How can we protect ourselves from falling into that trap? Balaam was greedy; he wanted the riches the Moabites offered him, even though he knew that to curse the Israelites was not what God wanted. How can we stay conscious of what’s wrong and what’s right?

Sunday

Think about the young man in the What Do You Think? section. Do you ever find yourself doing things you know are wrong, and yet justifying them in your mind? What are ways you justify doing wrong?

Do you guiltlessly do things now that you used to think were wrong? If so, what brought about the change? Is there any way to return your conscience to its former state? Would you want to?

Monday

Review the Key Text and ponder the fact that it took Balaam a lot longer than the donkey to realize a heavenly being was present.

Animals suffer along with the rest of humanity because of sin. When Balaam struck the donkey that he rode, he was causing this innocent animal to suffer. God wants us to make the lives of His creatures as bearable as possible; actually, He says that our righteousness is revealed by our regard for our animals (Prov. 12:10; see also Ps. 36:6 and 147:9).

What are ways that you could help innocent animals that are being abused? One way would be to volunteer at an animal shelter.

Tuesday

Read this week’s Punch Lines.

Even though Balaam had fallen short on his love for God, he first told the Moabites he would not curse the Israelites in order to make himself seem full of integrity. He put on a disguise that made him appear righteous, when he really cared only about his own benefit, not what God wanted.

Ponder your own character, and whether you do things for God or just to make yourself appear more righteous. Pray and ask for God’s guidance, and do what God wants you to do because you love Him, not because you’re worried about what others think of you.

Wednesday

Look at the quotes in the Other Eyes section. Which one speaks most to you? What are they saying is wrong with greed? Come up with a few short quotes yourself that express the evil nature of greed. Write them down and share them with someone else.

Thursday

Remember that God is all powerful. When God told Balaam not to curse the Israelites, He meant it. Balaam thought he could hide from God by appearing to be righteous, but God knows the heart; He knows when we are sincere and when we aren’t. God also knew that Balaam desired the wealth the Moabites offered him. He pretended not to want it, but God knew his heart. Ask yourself: Are there ways in which I am putting on masks, pretending to be what I am not?

Friday

Read the Flashlight quote again. In what ways does covetousness work against your soul? What are ways in which you can combat covetousness in your own life? Is it possible to fight it in our own strength?

Consider volunteering with friends to work in a soup kitchen, or work with your church on another project to help the homeless. Active service to help others is one of the best ways we can work with God to combat covetousness in our own hearts.

this week’s reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 40.

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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The children of Israel camped between the river and the high plain in a lush valley known for its rich, tropical climate shaded by palm trees. There the children of Israel relaxed from their recent victory in Bashan, and as they luxuriated in the fertile valley they made a costly error in judgment. They became familiar with the Midianites, and familiarity gave birth to ease. The result was key leaders of Israel mixing with Midianite women. Of course, the Midianites had plotted to sow the seeds of idolatry in Israel through the lure of these seductresses. As a result, many leaders of Israel got involved with promiscuity, and God acted swiftly, causing a plague to break out among the participants. Shaken into an awareness of their sin, some felt genuine sorrow for their behavior. But the leaders who led them astray were promptly put to death. This lesson captures the shocking, yet typical human behavior: There is no moment when the human heart is safe from temptation.

If there was ever an age in which young people live incubated in a relaxed moral environment, it is now. In this lesson there is a real warning emerging from the story and stated simply by the apostle Paul: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:11, 12, NIV). Ellen White reminds us: “The heart must be renewed by divine grace, or it will be in vain to seek for purity of life” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 460). Throughout this dark episode in Israel’s journey we are reminded to “guard well the avenues of the soul” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 460).

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Consider the seductive nature of sin and discover how to guard their hearts. (Know)
• See the similarities between this story and today’s cultural mood and sense the danger. (Feel)
• Decidedly fill the avenues of their soul with the grace of Christ and the activities of His kingdom. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Idolatry
• Purity
• Temptation (dealing with)

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.
Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

The symptoms of leprosy are likened to the effects of sin on the human soul. Leprosy starts as a subtle annoyance, a headache and occasional dizziness. The headaches might continue over several months without any visible signs on the skin. Small spots appear on the skin, eventually becoming hard nodes that open and fester. But by the time leprosy shows up on the skin the central nervous system has already been breaking down. The areas that are furthest removed from the heart lose sensation first. The tip of the nose, fingers, and toes become numb to pain. Perhaps the most difficult part of leprosy is the inability to feel pain. Serious damage can be inflicted on the appendages because the victim is unaware they are hurting themselves, and by that time it is too late. Some have described how leprosy, in its final stages, turns the hair white and shifts the facial structure, flattening the nose (due to atrophy and loss of circulation). The cheek bones tend to stick out as the lips retreat into tight skin. In the New Testament era, as soon as someone was diagnosed with leprosy, they were excommunicated from society and basically taken off the public record. Although they were still alive they were counted as dead.

It is no wonder that leprosy is often considered the perfect analogy of sin’s effects on people. Think about the many parallels to the way sin sneaks up on people and destroys them from the inside out.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Much like the infection of leprosy, the horrible seduction the Midianites managed to incite in Israel occurred because the children of God left the avenues of their soul open. Instead of devoting themselves to prayer or recounting the stories of God’s faithfulness to them, they filled up their time with idle living and curious perusal of the Midianite women and their religion. As you read the story remember the way the leprosy of sin has its way if we are not fully connected to God.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- Underline the key people mentioned in this story.
- Circle the various words that convey emotion in this story and draw a line to the persons feeling it.
- Place brackets around the major sections of this story as though they were scenes in a play. How many different themes do you see emerging from the story?
- If you had to identify one or two key verses in this story, which would you say captures the central point best?
- In this story, do you find...
  - An example to follow?
  - A prayer to pray?
  - A warning to heed?
  - A truth to proclaim?
  - An encouraging word to share?
  - An action to take or a change to make?

Extra Questions for Teachers:

- Does this story remind you of similar events or scenarios elsewhere in Scripture? How is it similar? What might be different?
- When you see God enact such swift and serious judgment on people, how does it affect your perception of and your relationship to Him?
- What might this story look like today?
  (Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: James 1:2-4; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Peter 2:9; James 1:12; Luke 11:4.)

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

This week’s story is shocking in several ways: (1) the way the children of Israel witnessed God’s blessing and victory and so quickly slipped into the most base and offensive behavior; (2) the way God orders judgment; (3) leaders (both good and evil) get tested and exposed for who they really are.

It’s painful to witness the roller-coaster ride the Israelites take in their faithfulness to God. When Joshua and Caleb sent spies out, it was probably from this wooded area of acacia trees not far from Jericho. The first verse of this story informs us that “the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite
women” and subsequently “joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor” (NIV). Baal was the deity of fertility so it is not a surprise that sexual entertainment and worship are connected in this pagan ritual. Apparently it was the “heads” or leaders of Israel that were seduced in this unthinkable act. When they worshipped Baal they “proclaimed themselves to be his followers” thus shunning their loyalty to God (The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 914).

God acted swiftly, and the leaders were killed and hung out in the sun for all to see. Why would God react so harshly? It is possible that young people today might recoil at stories that depict God sentencing people to death because of their sin. But those who united with Baal are no different from those who refused to enter the ark or the heathen nations that were dead set against God. They had made their choice, and, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23, NIV). The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary claims: “The chiefs of the tribes, if guilty, were to be executed. Their position among the people and their participation in idolatry made them primarily responsible” (vol. 1, p. 914). As a result, the people repented.

In verses 6-8 we see two forms of leadership exposed. While Israel’s leaders were hanging dead before the weeping congregation, Zimri publicly brought Cozbi, a Midianite prostitute, into his tent, mocking the shame of Israel. That this was done “in the sight of Moses” (verse 6) demonstrates how far this man had gone. Such poor leadership was met with the action of another type of leadership. Phineas, the son of Eleazar, who was the son of Aaron, was so offended by this affront to Moses and to God that he raced into the tent with a spear and killed them both. Such a passionate defense of the name of God exposed the integrity of Phineas as a leader, and one who would “succeed his father in the office of high priest” (The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 914). As a result, God removed the plague because Phineas was “zealous” for God’s sake.

Overall, this story is a window into the sinfulness of sin and the subtle way it creeps into our lives. Only by zealous or deliberate clinging to God’s mercy and grace can we fix our minds on what God wants for us.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have the students draw a stick person with five arrows or “avenues” pointing to the head or heart, and five arrows pointing away from the head or heart. Invite the students to identify five positive things they want coming into their minds and write one on each of five arrows pointing toward the figure. Then they can identify five things they would like to remove from their heads and hearts and write them on the five arrows pointing away from the figure.

In this week’s lesson we have discovered that we need to guard the avenues of our heart. Being deliberate about what comes in and goes out is critical. You

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• Other Eyes
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

• Flashlight
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

• Punch Lines
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
may want to have the students share their responses, and perhaps some students have similar goals and could be a source of encouragement to one another.

**Summary**

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The incident in which God’s people, and especially key leaders, completely surrendered their will and loyalty to Baal through the enticement of sexual immorality is sad. But the inspiring leadership of Moses and especially of Phineas can urge us on toward being intentional about what we do with our time, our mind, and the activities we engage in. Clearly, there are some things that are not as awful as worshipping Baal-peor, but are they stepping-stones in that direction? Paul tells the church of Philippi: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11, NIV).

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 41.

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roads to the soul

flashlight

“Yet we have a work to do to resist temptation. Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The mind should not be left to wander at random upon every subject that the adversary of souls may suggest” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 460).

keytext

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him.’”

(Numbers 25:10-12, NIV)
what do you think?

Rank the following items according to their power to cause major destruction to your relationship with God (1 is the most destructive and 5 is the least)

1. Media, movies, and music of a worldly nature
2. The example of key leaders who fall and are exposed as hypocrites
3. Promiscuity and sexual entertainment
4. Apathy and boredom—the absence of good input
5. Rationalizing sin with intellectual arrogance

Explain why you chose the top three you did. Which behaviors or avenues to the human heart not mentioned above would you include in this list? Why?

into the story

“While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the Lord’s anger burned against them.

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the Lord’s fierce anger may turn away from Israel.’

“So Moses said to Israel’s judges, ‘Each of you must put to death those of your men who have joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor.’

“Then an Israelite man brought to his family a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear through both of them—through the Israelite and into the woman’s body. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.’

“The name of the Israelite who was killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family. And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Cozbi daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family.

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them, because they treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the affair of Peor and their sister Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, the woman who was killed when the plague came as a result of Peor.’”

(Numbers 25:1-18, NIV)

did you know?

A study that surveyed the perceptions of Americans about 10 moral behaviors showed that the following percentages of people believed the following were morally acceptable:

- Gambling 61%
- Cohabitation 60%
- Sexual fantasies 59%
- Having an abortion 45%
- Having a sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex other than their spouse 42%
- Pornography 38%
- Profanity 36%
- Drunkenness 35%
- Homosexual sex 30%
- Using nonprescription drugs 17%

(Barna Research Group, Morality Continues to Decay, November 3, 2003)
OUT OF THE STORY

Read the story through and underline the key people mentioned in this story.

Circle the various words that convey emotion in this story and draw a line to the person or persons feeling it.

Place brackets around the major sections of this story as though they were scenes in a play. How many different themes do you see emerging from this story?

If you had to identify one or two key verses in this story, which would you say captures the central point?

As you read this story, is there . . .

An example to follow?

A prayer to pray?

A warning to heed?

A truth to proclaim?

An encouraging word to share?

An action to take or a change to make?

punch lines

“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4, NIV).

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17, NIV).

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life” (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:9-11, NIV).

“That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it.”—C. S. Lewis, 20th-century English novelist and essayist.

“Ever notice that the whisper of temptation can be heard farther than the loudest call to duty?”

—Earl Wilson, 20th-century U.S. pitcher in Major League Baseball.
Sabbath
As you rank the items in the What Do You Think? section, explain why you put them in the order you did. Do you sense that the world is becoming numb to how wrong sin is? What are some examples of this from your perspective? Read James 4:8-10 and consider how you might apply this challenge and this promise to your life this week.

Sunday
Read the Into the Story passage and answer the questions in the Out of the Story section. This story is loaded with many sobering events and some inspiring moments. As you work through the study questions ask yourself, “What is God trying to say to me in this passage?” If you had to boil your insights down to 10 words or less, what would you say is the message you want to take away from this story? Which verse or phrase captures your attention the most and why?

Monday
The Key Text this week highlights Phinehas and his zealous attempt to vindicate God’s name and the authority of His will for Israel. Read this passage and think of some other biblical heroes that were passionate and unwilling to let God’s name be shamefully mocked by others. Reflect on your experience over the past month and identify a moment or two when you had the opportunity to stand up for God. In what ways do you want to be like Phinehas in his zeal for God? (Avoid throwing spears, however.)

Tuesday
In the Flashlight section Ellen White captures the essence of what we can do to prevent such a shameful incident from occurring in our lives. Read the passage again.

Part of the problem emerges when boredom or idleness leaves room for literally anything to creep in. Perhaps one of the best ways to guard our hearts is to engage in activities that deepen our experience with God. Who do you know that seems to fill up their life with rich, meaningful activities and input? Maybe they are avid readers or observers. It might be that they work diligently to serve others, or they might have a powerful prayer life. Who is your role model in this regard? What is one thing you can do this week to strengthen your own devotion to God?

Wednesday
As you read the Punch Lines for this week you will notice some passages that might be very familiar to you as well as some that are new. Number the passages from 1 to 5 according to how familiar you are with them. You may want to list these references in your Bible next to the story in Numbers 25 for future reference.

Which passage speaks to you most at this time in your life? Which passage applies to a friend or family member for whom you want to pray this week? As you pray, consider writing a note or sharing with them some encouraging words this week.

Thursday
While this week’s lesson is a stark reminder of the sinfulness of sin, it is also a reminder of God’s covenant of grace to journey with us to the Promised Land. Ellen White reminds us that “the heart must be renewed by divine grace, or it will be in vain to seek for purity of life. He who attempts to build up a noble, virtuous character independent of the grace of Christ is building his house upon the shifting sand” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 460). Nothing strengthens our grip on God’s plan for our lives as does deepening our understanding of His love and mercy displayed at Calvary. What are some ways you can remember Calvary throughout the week? Find a few tangible ways to jog your memory throughout the day about the most pivotal moment in history.

Friday
It is hard to imagine an event such as the worship of the Baal of Peor ever happening to you. Yet the incident started so subtly that it may have been hard to notice. Reflect on some of the big events of the Bible and consider for a moment how they began. As you determine to remain true to God, know that your faithfulness begins somewhere. Where does it begin with you?


this week’s reading*
Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 41.

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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This lesson is based on chapter 42 of Patriarchs and Prophets, “The Law Repeated.” It tells the story of the Israelites preparing to enter the Promised Land. Because of his sin at Kadesh, however, Moses was not allowed to enter Canaan. The role of leadership for the Israelites was given to Joshua. Moses was then “directed to rehearse to them the history of their deliverance from Egypt and their journeyings in the wilderness, and also to recapitulate the law spoken from Sinai” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 463).

Ellen G. White goes on to describe the scene: “Moses stood before the people to repeat his last warnings and admonitions. His face was illumined with a holy light. His hair was white with age; but his form was erect, his countenance expressed the unabated vigor of health, and his eye was clear and undimmed. It was an important occasion, and with deep feeling he portrayed the love and mercy of their Almighty Protector” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 463).

This lesson offers an opportunity to portray the “love and mercy” of our Almighty Protector. By presenting the law in a positive light, students should be able to make the connection between God’s law and His love. By obedience to God’s law, the Israelites enjoyed the rich benefits of God’s way of life. Conversely, by disobeying God’s guidelines, the Israelites tasted the bitter consequences of life apart from God. In the end, God’s way always represents the best way to live.

II. TARGET

The students will:
- Learn the value of being obedient to God’s law. (Know)
- Make the connection between obedience to God and a more abundant life. (Feel)
- Be challenged to obey God’s laws. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- Existence of a sovereign God
- Law of God
- Decision-making

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Pass out a card and a pen to each student. Instruct them to write down a law that they would like to see enacted by Congress. It might be a silly law such as “Everyone must sleep in until noon.” Or students can write a serious law such as “All abortions are illegal.” Collect the cards and then read each proposed law.

Discuss the merits of the laws submitted. Would the laws truly improve the quality of life or would there be some unintended consequences that would negate the benefit of the law? What makes a law a “good” law?
Illustration

Our world is governed by all sorts of laws: municipal, state, national, religious, natural, ceremonial, economic, environmental, moral, etc. Some laws seem senseless. Other laws are essential to our freedom and security. To introduce the topic of laws, give the following true or false quiz about crazy laws in the United States, or research some in your own country:

1. In Lawrence, Kansas, it is illegal to walk down the street with bees in your hat.
2. It is against the law in Michigan to hitch a crocodile to a fire hydrant.
3. In Lebanon, Tennessee, it is illegal for a husband to kick his wife out of bed for having cold feet, but a wife can kick her husband out of bed for any reason at any time.
4. In Atlanta, Georgia, it is illegal to tie a giraffe to a signpost.
5. In Danville, Pennsylvania, it is mandated that every fire hydrant must be checked one hour before every fire.
6. In Woonsocket, Rhode Island, it is illegal to remove icicles from buildings by taking pot shots at them with a rifle.
7. In Lexington, Kentucky, it is illegal to carry ice-cream cones in your pockets.
8. You can be arrested in Minneapolis for teasing a snake.
9. In Arkansas it is illegal to blindfold a cow if you’re near any public highway.
10. In Topeka, Kansas, it is illegal to annoy a squirrel. (How do you annoy a squirrel? Act like a nut?)

When the students have finished the quiz, grade it by telling them that the answer to every question is “true.”

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Laws are a part of life. Not all laws, however, make a lot of sense to us. Some laws seem reasonable only when we get older. For example, maybe when you were a young child you wanted to stick a fork in the electrical outlet. You may have thrown a tizzy because your parents refused you the thrill of the zap.

Only as we mature do we see the value of the laws our parents enforced. In the same way, it is only as we mature as God’s children that we understand how God’s laws are given only to provide freedom and security. God’s laws are never the senseless demands of a dictator who revels in restricting His children. As Paul writes: “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Romans 7:12, NIV).

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section together, expand the discussion about God’s laws by explaining how some laws are specific to a time, place, and culture, while other laws represent timeless principles. Read the following laws (NIV) and have the students go to either the corner of the room that is labeled “SPECIFIC TO TIME, PLACE, AND CULTURE,” or the other corner of the room marked “TIMELESS PRINCIPLES.”

- Leviticus 19:27: “Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard.”
- Leviticus 18:21: “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God.”
- Matthew 22:37, 39: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” . . . And . . . ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.”
- Leviticus 11:26: “Every animal that has a split hoof not completely divided or that does not chew the cud is unclean for you; whoever touches the carcass of any of them will be unclean.” (Italics supplied.)
- Deuteronomy 21:18, 19: “If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town.”

Questions for discussion:

- What timeless principles might be behind the laws that are specific to time, place, and culture? (See Sharing Context and Background for help with the answer to this question.)
- How does someone differentiate between God’s laws that are no longer binding and timeless laws that are eternal?
• How does knowing the lawgiver help someone keep the law?
• What role does God’s law play in making decisions?
• Is there any difference between God’s law and guiding principles? If so, what?
• Do any of God’s laws obstruct our freedom and happiness? Explain.
• Why do you think Moses was so specific in spelling out the blessings and the curses that correlate with keeping the law? Do the blessings still come as a result of obedience? Do the curses still come as a result of disobedience? Discuss your answers.

Sharing Context and Background
Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

One of the issues that emerges from this lesson centers on the relevancy of laws for Christians today. Are the laws given to Israel still binding today? The commentary in the footnotes of the Life Application Bible offers this answer:

“God’s laws are designed to guide all people toward lifestyles that are healthy, upright, and devoted to God. Their purpose was to point out sin (or potential sin) and show the proper way to deal with that sin. The Ten Commandments, the heart of God’s law, are just as applicable today as they were 3,000 years ago because they proclaim a lifestyle endorsed by God. They are the perfect expression of who God is and how He wants people to live.

“But God gave other laws besides the Ten Commandments. Are these just as important? God never issued a law that didn’t have a purpose. However, many of the laws we read in the Pentateuch were directed specifically to people of that time and culture. Although a specific law may not apply to us, the timeless truth or principle behind the law does.

“For example, Christians do not practice animal sacrifice in worship. However, the principles behind the sacrifices—forgiveness for sin and thankfulness to God—still apply. The sacrifices pointed to the ultimate sacrifice made for us by Jesus Christ. The New Testament says that with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Old Testament laws were fulfilled. This means that while the Old Testament laws help us recognize our sins and correct our wrongdoings, it is Jesus Christ who takes our sins away. Jesus is now our primary example to follow because He alone perfectly obeyed the law and modeled the true intent.”*

In his parting address to Israel, Moses reiterated the importance of obedience to God’s laws. The apostle Paul said: “The law . . . does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. . . . The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:17, 24, NIV).

Here’s the bottom line: It is important to keep God’s laws. In essence, Moses told the children of Israel that their eternal destiny was in their own hands.

Teaching From . . .
Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• Other Eyes
Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

• Flashlight
Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

• Punch Lines
Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
God’s hands are tied by the choice we make. We can choose life by accepting Christ’s fulfillment of the law and living in the transforming power of His grace. Or we can choose death by disobeying the laws of God; consequently, we are not led “to Christ that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24, NIV).

III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words:

God gave us laws, not to wreck our lives, but rather to provide guidelines regarding the best way to live. By choosing God’s way we are choosing life. For an activity that highlights this point, have the students read Deuteronomy 30:15-18 and then write a short children’s story based on this text. The story should underscore the importance of wise choices. When the students have the story written (and illustrated if there’s an artist in the group), arrange for them to go and share their story with younger kids in another Sabbath School class.

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:

To bring this lesson to a fitting close, use a beach ball to illustrate that keeping God’s law is not a matter of trying real hard to be good. Will power won’t cut it when it comes to the law. Explain how some people approach spiritual life as if it were an assignment to keep a hundred beach balls submerged in the Pacific Ocean at the same time. Explain: “You may keep a ball under water with your feet and a couple more submerged with your hands, but soon you’ll feel defeated and exhausted.”

Similarly, some people think, If I can just hide my failures to obey the law and keep my sins like pride and gluttony and lust under the surface so others don’t see them, then maybe I’ll at least look like a Christian. That approach to keeping the law is a sure recipe for failure.

So what’s the answer? Get out of the water and into the boat with Jesus. The key is not to try harder to keep every law; rather, the key is to live in the presence of the One who perfectly fulfilled the law in our behalf. For sin and Jesus cannot coexist in the same heart. The goal of spiritual life is to always remain in the presence of God in order to let His life be willed through you.


Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Affirmation
One of the marks of an ideal learning environment is that it feels safe. When discussing a potentially controversial topic such as the law, it is important to affirm all opinions expressed by group members. Let each person know that their comments are appreciated—even if their opinions differ from your own. Remember, affirmation does not mean agreement. Affirm even those comments that you believe to be heretical. By doing this, you communicate that everyone has a right to express an opinion. When a comment is made that you believe to be way off base, you can kindly offer an alternative point of view for people to consider. Never condemn or attack the person who made the comment.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 42.

*A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about Beginning of the End at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
After the public rehearsal of the law, Moses completed the work of writing all the laws, the statutes, and the judgments which God had given him, and all the regulations concerning the sacrificial system. . . . Still the great leader was filled with fear that the people would depart from God. In a most sublime and thrilling address he set before them the blessings that would be theirs on condition of obedience, and the curses that would follow upon transgression” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 466).
What do you think? Write your opinion next to each statement: A (Agree), NS (Not sure), D (Disagree). Explain your answers.

____ If I keep God’s commandments I will experience optimal happiness.
____ Nobody can perfectly obey God’s law.
____ There is no absolute standard of right and wrong.
____ All teenagers know the difference between right and wrong.
____ The Bible can be a helpful guide when facing a difficult decision.
____ As long as we do our best to obey God’s law, we’re assured of going to heaven.
____ Females are better at keeping God’s law than are males.

The Hebrew term for “law” is tôrah; this often refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Scripture and includes the idea of “direction” and “instruction.” According to Jewish tradition, there are 613 laws contained in the tôrah—365 negative commandments and 248 positive commands. There were various types of laws such as moral, ceremonial, civil, and health laws. When studying the Bible today, it is important to distinguish (by carefully looking at the context of the passage) what type of law is being referred to.

In ancient Israel, however, all the laws were considered to be commands from God. Thus, the Jews of old did not distinguish between the various kinds of laws and held every law to be sacred.—Siegfried H. Horn, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 1979), p. 660.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.”

“If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.”

“However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. . . . You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.”

(Deuteronomy 4:1, 2, 35, 39, 40; 6:5, 6; 28:1-3, 15-19, NIV)
Circle the words that highlight the sovereignty of God.

Underline the commands of God.

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and list some of the blessings that God promises will be the result of obeying His commands:

Now add to that list of blessings any other benefits that you have discovered as a result of obeying God’s commands:

Read Deuteronomy 28:15-68 and list some of the curses that God says will be the result of disobeying His commands:

Now add to that list other negative consequences that you have discovered from disobeying God’s commands:

Read Matthew 22:37-40. How does seeing God’s commands that way help explain the idea of blessings and cursings?

“God is consistent, but he is also unpredictable. He is consistent in his nature. You always know where you are with God, but you seldom know what he is going to do next.”
—Graham Cook, current British preacher.

“People obey the law for one of two reasons: they either love God or fear punishment. When both of these break down, the result is an environment that breeds violence, poverty, and anarchy.”
—Jack Kemp, Christian Reader, vol. 32, no. 3.
Suppose now that you committed to making all your decisions—big and small—consistent with the laws of God. How might you benefit? Is there any downside to building one’s life on the teachings of God?

Make this a matter of prayer and start experimenting with the idea that every decision should reflect the will of God.

Write a modern paraphrase of this closing challenge that Moses put before the Israelites: “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20, NIV).

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**Sabbath**

Reflect on the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:34-40, NIV).

Review your answers in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. Does Jesus’ statement about the law change any of the opinions you expressed in that exercise?

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**Sunday**

So often the law is seen as something negative. However, this is clearly an absurd notion. Try to imagine a world devoid of laws. What would it be like? The Key Text reminds us of God’s faithfulness. Reflect on the virtue of faithfulness. Who is your most faithful friend?

After reading the Into the Story excerpts, write a psalm of praise thanking God for the blessings and benefits of keeping His laws.

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**Monday**

How would your closest friends rate your faithfulness factor? How can you be more like God in this area?

The Key Text also references a “covenant of love” that God makes with us. How would you define this covenant? In what ways has God kept this covenant with you? How might you live out this covenant with your friends and family members?

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**Tuesday**

Ellen White mentions that Moses “was filled with fear that the people would depart from God.” Thus, he tried to communicate clearly both the benefits of following God and the pain of disobeying Him. Moses set before the Israelites the blessings that would be theirs on condition of obedience, and the curses that would follow upon transgression (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 466).

Identify from Moses’ life those experiences through which he learned about the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience. What can we learn from the experience of Moses?

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**Wednesday**

Based on the texts listed in Punch Lines, would you say the picture of the law in Scripture is generally positive or negative? Explain your answer.

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**Thursday**

Every day you are bombarded with countless decisions. Some of these decisions could impact your life in significant ways (“Will I experiment with drugs?”); other decisions seem much more menial (“Should I wear my blue shirt or my red one?”). In the end, your life will simply be the sum total of these decisions. So what will you base your decisions on? A hunch? Your parents’ advice? A book by Dr. Phil? Obviously there are many options.

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**Friday**

Write a modern paraphrase of this closing challenge that Moses put before the Israelites: “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20, NIV).

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_This week’s reading_*

_Patriarchs and Prophets_, chapter 42.

*A special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets* has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year._
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
This lesson focuses on the last few recorded moments of Moses’ life. We see him speak to the children of Israel and give them instructions. We read that he blesses them with his words. We also see that he admonishes them to remain true to the faithful God they serve. As well, he is shown by God the upcoming events in which the children of Israel will fall away from the God who has brought them out of Egypt, and again he admonishes Israel to remain faithful. In the end we see God showing His undying love for Moses by resurrecting him from the grave in order to be with God in heaven.

It is a great story to teach from in that we see Moses’ humanity as he looks over his life. We also see his close connection with God, and how he willingly gives his life to what God has planned for him. We see him accept the consequences of his actions by not entering the Promised Land, and we understand the utter frustration Satan must have felt at losing this great friend of God from this earth as he was taken to heaven.

II. TARGET
The students will:
• Know that Moses, while having ups and downs, stayed true to his God.
• Feel that they are encouraged to live the same sort of life Moses did.
• Have the opportunity to respond in a positive way in their relationship with God.

III. EXPLORE
• Success
• Confession/repentance
• Death and resurrection
You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED
Activity
Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, ask the following:
• Did you know this was the first time God had raised someone from the dead?
• What else had God done to get someone to heaven (Enoch)?
• Do you think that if Moses had done God’s will in regard to getting water from the rock, he would have made it into the Promised Land? Would that have changed history? Why or why not?

Illustration
Share this illustration in your own words:
There was once a young man who was invited to a party by his best friend. His best friend asked if he would bring some pistachio ice cream with him to the party. The young man agreed that he would. About a
week later, the best friend asked him again to bring the pistachio ice cream; again the young man agreed to provide it. On his way to the party he was distracted, his car had some problems, his girlfriend was not cooperating with him, traffic was bad so he was late, and more than anything, with all the stress he forgot what type of ice cream his best friend wanted.

As he pulled into the supermarket, he had a hard time finding a parking space. He finally found one—now he was that much later—and he went to the ice-cream aisle. He couldn’t believe his eyes; there must have been 100 different types of ice cream! He couldn’t remember the type of ice cream his friend wanted, even if his life depended on it. So he decided to play it safe; he got vanilla.

Upon arriving at his friend’s house, he knocked on the door and was let in. He went to his friend and provided him with the vanilla ice cream. His friend had a puzzled look on his face. “I’m sure glad you came, and I’m even glad you did some of what I asked, but how come you didn’t follow my instructions completely?” he said. “Pistachio is what I asked for, not vanilla. In fact, I’m horribly allergic to vanilla!”

Needless to say, the young man felt horrible. The stress must have gotten to him, and he wasn’t able to fulfill the request. Luckily, his best friend decided he didn’t want ice cream after all, and they were able to salvage the party and the friendship. In fact, everyone there loved the vanilla ice cream and called the party a huge success!

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

What does the preceding story have to do with this lesson? Moses did not do everything God had asked. He made some mistakes. However, together, Moses and God were able to deliver the people of Israel to the Promised Land. Their partnership is considered a success, so much so that God brought Moses to heaven to live with Him. This just may speak to what kind of friends God and Moses were. This relationship can be considered a wonderful success.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• Who are the main actors in this story?
• Why is Moses so intent on the people listening to his words?
• What does he mean when he says that his words are not “idle”?
• Why is it so important to understand Moses’ words?
• Was God gracious in this story even though He did not allow Moses into the Promised Land?
• How do you think Moses felt when God revealed the upcoming events in Israel’s future?
• How do you think you would have reacted knowing these people with whom you had worked so hard would abandon everything you stood for in order to worship other gods?
• What did you think of the song Moses sang?
• What did you think about the blessing Moses bestowed on the children of Israel?

If you have musical students, or you yourself are musical, try putting the song or the blessing of Moses to music. Have the students help. There is some great poetry in the verses! Another option would be to have the group create a readers’ theater out of the verses. This would be a good creative exercise that would show the students how lyrical some of the Hebrew text really can be.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Success:

Most people of faith think of Moses’ life as a successful one. There was one incident that created a problem for him, but the rest of his life seemed to be according to the will of God—from his time in the basket to his time on Pisgah.

We know what success looks like for a prophet, but what does it look like in your life? Take some time to ask these questions:

a. Who in your life do you consider a success? How do you try to emulate them?

b. What is it that you want out of life? When will you feel you have arrived?

c. What is most important to you? Are you living according to a great vision, like Moses, or are you just getting by day by day?
Confession/repentance:

Why is Moses considered a success? Perhaps for the same reason that David is considered a success. While both men clearly made mistakes and bad calls in their lives, they were both willing to be honest with God and confess their mistakes, as well as repent of their sins and move away from them. How do we react to our sins and mistakes?

We have a tendency to wallow in the guilt we feel from our mistakes. However, the lives of these two men are pretty clear in showing us that we can move away from our sins and become successful in our spiritual lives, which leads to success in the other areas of our lives.

Death/resurrection:

This story is a great example of what it means to be a friend of God. Moses maintained that friendship with God to the point that God did not want to be without His friend. He therefore resurrected Moses and brought him to heaven in order to be with Him. What a wonderful testament to friendship and to God’s love for us. Do you think God would miss you that much?

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have the students take a pen and paper and write a list of things that they believe would make them a success in life. They don’t need to show it to anyone; it is just for themselves. Then have them fold up the paper and put it in their Bibles. It is a thing to be referenced, changed, and to remind them of what they see as successful. Remind them that there are many things they can be in life, but being a friend of God is the most important.

Tips for Top-notch Teaching

A Real Character!

Students grow when you present characters with whom they can identify. What are the marks of humanity in the characters that are universal? What are the character traits that young people can hang their hat on and say “I’m just like that”? We need to present each biblical character in their full robe of humanity; that is to say, what makes them like us! Rather than give a whitewashed example, study the text to see how these passionate people sometimes led incredibly messy lives. Never be afraid to show them as they were. God was not afraid of them, and it will give the young people an understanding that God can use even the messiest of us.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Helen Keller said: “Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.” Perhaps Moses would have resonated with those words. He lived his life to the fullest by following what it was that God wanted for him. As well, he made it his utmost priority that he become a friend of the Creator. In doing so, he showed a race of people how to honor God by their lives. More than that, he left a legacy of obedience that we can look to and which will help us understand what it means to be blessed by God in everything we do. Moses showed us that success is not about what we do, but about who we know. As well, Moses’ life has taught us that God cares for His people and is willing to communicate to those who are willing to seek Him out. He does not end relationships when we sin, but allows us to confess and repent of what we have done, and He helps move us in a different direction.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 43.

* A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about Beginning of the End at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
last longing look

flashlight

“The great adversary declared that the divine sentence—‘Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return’ (Genesis 3:19)—gave him possession of the dead. The power of the grave had never been broken, and all who were in the tomb he claimed as his captives, never to be released from his dark prison house. For the first time Christ was about to give life to the dead” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 478).

keytext

“When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them, ‘Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.’”

(Deuteronomy 32:45-47, NIV)
Agree or disagree: (1) Moses should have been allowed into the Promised Land; (2) Moses was a success.

How long do you think it would take you to get frustrated with the person in charge of a trip you were on if they kept you wandering around in the desert for 40 years?

1 month? ___
3 months? ___
12 months? ___
5 years? ___

(Think how quickly you get frustrated when your dad won’t stop to ask for directions.)

Moses has been given credit for being the author of “the Torah” or the first five books of our Bible. While some might dispute this, it is generally understood to be true.

At that time, it was probably passed down by oral tradition (the telling of stories) from generation to generation. The finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls has taught us that oral tradition was very accurate in keeping the key points of the stories.

Can you imagine keeping every detail together in a long story like that of the Israelites and their exodus from Egypt? We have a hard enough time remembering one thing that our parents ask us to do!

“Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land—from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the Lord said to him, ‘This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.’

“And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone.

The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.

“Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.

“Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.”

(Deuteronomy 34:1-12, NIV)
OUT OF THE STORY

Have you ever pondered this part of Moses’ story before? Was God fair in not allowing Moses to enter into the Promised Land because of one mistake?

To whom was God trying to teach a lesson by not letting Moses into the Promised Land?

What’s the big deal about hitting a rock rather than talking to it? The results ended up the same, didn’t they? (See Deut. 32:48-52.)

Did Moses do anything else in his life that could have earned the same kind of punishment the rock incident did? What reason did God give for choosing the punishment He did? (Read Numbers 20:12.)

Not only was Moses the first person to be raised from the dead, he had another special honor in His relationship with God. What was it? (Read Exodus 33:11 and Numbers 12:8.)

What legacy did Moses leave to the Israelites at his death?

Read Deuteronomy 31:1-8. Moses left a new _____________________.

Read Deuteronomy 31:9-13. Moses left a written _________________.

Read Deuteronomy 31:30–32:47. Moses left a ___________________ to memorize.

Why was this legacy so important?

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

other eyes

“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome.”


“What is success? I think it is a mixture of having a flair for the thing that you are doing; knowing that it is not enough, that you have got to have hard work and a certain sense of purpose.”—Margaret Thatcher, 20th-century British politician; prime minister (1975-1990).
Sabbath

In the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson there was a question about whether or not you thought that Moses was a success. The question “What defines success?” is loaded. Actually, it can be answered in different ways for different people. Read Deuteronomy 34:10 and spend some time thinking about what makes someone successful in your mind. How do you want to define success in your life?

Sunday

Read all of Deuteronomy 31 to 34. Pay specific attention to the texts listed in the Into the Story section of this study. What specific things did you learn about Moses? Had you ever before read his blessing on the children of Israel? How did God know the people of Israel would relate to Him? How do you think Moses felt when God told him that Israel would forsake Him? Do you consider Moses a success when he died? Why or why not? (Remember, he did successfully take the people to the Promised Land.)

Monday

In the Key Text this week, why does Moses tell the people to remember the words the Lord has for them? That is also true about what the words of the Bible have for us. Moses’ life is a great example of what it means to follow the laws and the words of God. Even at the end of his life, when he had been with these people for a lifetime, Moses was admonishing them to be true to the Word of God, for truly that was their salvation. And the Word of God continues to show us the saving grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Why might memorizing Scripture texts help us in our daily lives?

Tuesday

Did you realize that this was the first time that Christ was going to raise someone from the dead? Think about what must have been going on in the mind of Satan as God came down to raise Moses from his sleep? He must have thought that he had dominion (rule) over Moses because he had died. However, the Flashlight quote tells us that Christ came down and took Moses to heaven with Him. What a blow to what Satan perceived as a victory. It is one of the first times we see, in the Bible, how Christ is more powerful than death!

Wednesday

Look up “quotes about success” on any Internet search engine. What do you find interesting about the results you get?

They rely on different measures of success. To some, it is money, to others fame, to even others it is something more intangible, such as intelligence or peace or satisfaction. Success is one of those things that we all look at a little differently.

Christians have an even different outlook. For us success is measured in relation to the will of God in our lives. We rest our success squarely on Christ’s shoulders and try to become examples to the world of what He is to us. That is the measure of our success.

Thursday

How do you know if you are a success? Who is it that you compare yourself to in order to measure up? Is your success based on grades or on athletic achievement?

There are so many ways we find ourselves not measuring up. Sometimes it is scary. Moses had a great number of people who were looking to see if he was a success or not. It must have sometimes been scary for him, leading God’s people to the land He had promised them.

But Moses was a success because he always came back to full reliance on God.

Friday

The story of Moses is full of adventure, right up until the end of his life. He faced many trials and tribulations with wonderful results because of his faith and relationship with God. Think about being at the end of your life and looking back on what you have done, and how you have fostered your relationship with God; what would you say about it?

Write a paragraph as if you were about to die and you were looking back on your spiritual walk with God. What was it like? How do you want others to remember it?


this week’s reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 43.

*A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
I. SYNOPSIS

This week the focus is on promises and on the constancy of God in the lives of His people. We see a nation that might have fallen apart with the death of Moses, but rather encourages Joshua to be bold and courageous and decides to follow him. As well, we see a God who transfers His promises to Moses’ successor. His Word is His bond, and He will not forget a promise that He has made.

As you teach this week, remind the students that we have all made promises that we have not kept. Oftentimes the reasons for not keeping promises are very valid; however, it is still a fact that they are promises not kept. This is often a very sore spot for teenagers as they are looking for someone who is solid in their lives. Remind them that we all fall short; however, there is One who has made promises that will always be kept. Show them scriptures that verify this, and show them anecdotal evidence in your life that will truly attest to how good God is at keeping His promises.

We know that fidelity is important for young people. Kenda Creasy Dean, considered a “theologian of youth culture,” delineates in her book Practicing Passion these three important aspects of spiritual life—being there, being known, and being moved. “Being there” is incredibly important for young people. This story shows how God is there for us in not only words, but action. It also shows the transcendence of His grace toward us as evidenced by God allowing His promises to continue through generations.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Know that God’s promises are always kept.
• Feel that God has made promises to them that He will keep.
• Respond by taking their own promises seriously and working to fulfill their word in others’ lives.

III. EXPLORE

• New earth
• Grief
• Leadership

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Say the following in your own words: You have made a list of people who make promises to you and noted how they may have or may not have followed through on those promises. Are your answers a little depressing?

Where all can see, make a list of the people below. Ask the students to rank them from (1) the person or group most likely to keep their promises to you to (12)
Therefore, I would need to come up with at least one half of the money for my bike that, besides, cost twice as much as hers did. Needless to say, I was heartbroken. And I had to work for months to come up with more money. But I did learn something—a promise made to someone else is not necessarily a promise made to me.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story
Share the following in your own words:
The situation in the previous story is repeated often in life. However, in our Scripture passage, especially the first chapter of Joshua, you see that what happened to the person in the story did not happen to Joshua. God had decided to honor the promise He made to Moses and to the people of Israel. Just because the leader changed, God did not forget what He had promised to the children of Israel. Besides that, God was glorified by the actions of His followers as they found their way into Jericho as spies.

Out of the Story for Teachers
After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

You know this lesson is about promises. And we have a tendency to look at the story from the perspective of God’s chosen people. However, what if we looked at it from the point of view of the people who lived in the Promised Land? Ask these questions and have the students come up with some answers:

1. How would you feel if a foreign nation attacked and occupied your land?
2. How would you feel if this nation claimed that their God was the one who gave them the right to occupy your land?
3. What if you had heard about all the amazing things that had happened to them over the years and you knew that your town was next?
4. What do you think is the best way to deal with these “chosen” people? Would you go to meet them, open wide your doors, go on the defensive?

Have the students role-play different scenarios that might have arisen as occupants of the Israelites’ “Promised Land” tried to figure out how to face them. Ask them to come up with different ideas about how to...
handle the invaders and their God. Have fun, and see if they come up with anything creative.

Ask them these questions:
1. Would you ever doubt God if He led you by a pillar of smoke and fire? If He was present in your life in a literal way every day, wouldn’t it be easier to know there was a God?
2. What would you do in life if this were the case? If you knew you were following the will of God without a shadow of a doubt, how would you live your life differently? Would you be more bold in the way you went about things?

Share with them that even though we don’t have a visual context in which to see God in our lives, we can look at where we have been and see where God worked. Give them examples and ask them to share where God has worked in their lives.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

There are many amazing facts about this story, and the story leading up to the crossing of the River Jordan. First of all, there is some discussion as to how many people actually left Egypt and went to the Promised Land. Some argue that there were millions, while others argue that there were just a few thousand. While this doesn’t change the context of the story, it does make for interesting thought. How much more powerful would God have to be if there were just a few thousand Israelites as opposed to a few million? Or would it have been harder to handle a few million people? How do a few million people travel together? These are interesting questions.

If you ever go to Israel and have a chance to see the ancient ruins of Jericho, you will be amazed. The first thing that hits you is what a great place it is in the middle of desert. There are date palm trees and other fruit trees growing. It truly is an oasis in the desert. No wonder people lived there. When you go to the ruins you see that the city was not as big as you might have imagined it. It is really very small by modern standards. However, this does not diminish the miracles that were worked by God in this instance. In ancient times the city was considered impregnable and was a huge obstacle for the children of Israel.

As well, there are some major themes that can be picked up throughout this passage of Scripture:

1. **Be bold and courageous.** As Joshua assumed leadership of Israel, he was encouraged to be “strong and courageous” (1:18). Perhaps that is a good lesson for those of us who live our lives trying to follow God’s will.
2. **Promises are for keeping.** God doesn’t promise what He cannot deliver. Regardless of the object of the promise (see Joshua 1:3), God fulfills what He set out to do for His people. Promises we make and keep honor God. In dealing with Rahab (chapter 2) the spies honored God by protecting her family for her. We, in the same way, honor God by being people of our word and following through on what we say we will do.

**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words:
Bring the students together and spend a bit of time talking about promises that we make to God. Remind them that those promises are important as well in building our relationship with Him. Have each one write on a small piece of paper something that they want to promise God. Have them fold these papers into their Bibles as a constant reminder that our promises matter to God.

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:
The concept of “being there” is vital to a young person’s experience with God. This story allows them to understand that God not only loves them, but is willing to be in continual relationship with them regardless of what they do. When we are unfaithful, God remains faithful. As you can see in Joshua, chapter 2, we are ambassadors of God’s promises when we keep the promises that we make in His name. It is important that we show to others the fidelity God shows to us.

In this lesson we see a people willing to follow a leader who leans upon the words of God, a leader who takes the legacy of his predecessor and is willing to follow in his footsteps. This is an important example for us, the leaders, depending on the words of God, leading those who will come after us. Our legacy will be those young people who grow a passion for Jesus Christ and who carry on where we leave off in showing others the fidelity that Christ shows us.

Tips for Top-notch Teaching
Peer Voices
Students learn by listening to many different voices. It would be great if, while you prepare this lesson, you could get a few students who are in your leadership team and have them go through the material with you. They will feel included, take ownership, and perhaps teach better than you ever could have. Students love to hear their peers tell of their experience and often learn from each other much more than they learn from us.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 44.
* A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about Beginning of the End at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
promises don’t die

flashlight

“While they were filled with grief at their great loss [of Moses], the people knew that they were not left alone. The pillar of cloud rested over the tabernacle by day, and the pillar of fire by night, an assurance that God would still be their guide and helper if they would walk in the way of His commandments” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 481).

keytext

“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.”

(Joshua 1:7, NIV)
Below is a list of people who routinely make promises to you in your life. Beside their names, indicate whether or not they have: broken a promise (BP), kept a promise (KP), or forgot a promise (FP).

_____ Father  ____ Boyfriend/girlfriend
_____ Mother  ____ Pastor
_____ Sister  ____ Friend
_____ Brother  ____ Government
_____ Grandparent(s)  ____ Advertisers
_____ Teacher

Spend some time remembering the circumstances in which each of these broke, kept, or forgot their promise to you. List them on a sheet of paper in the order they appear above. Then ask yourself the following: Who promised the most? Who delivered on their promise?

“After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide: ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west.

No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.’

“So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ‘Go through the camp and tell the people, “Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own.”’

“But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, ‘Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: “The Lord your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.” Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers until the Lord gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise.’

“Then they answered Joshua, ‘Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against
your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!”

(Joshua 1, NIV)

“Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled” (Joshua 21:45, NIV).

“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs” (Romans 15:8, NIV).

“Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses” (1 Kings 8:56, NIV).

“Then they believed his promises and sang his praise” (Psalm 106:12, NIV).

“In the story of Rahab in Joshua 2 (also a part of this week’s Scripture portion), how did the people of the Promised Land feel about the Israelites coming to their land?

Circle a promise in this passage that you can adapt to your own life right now.

Underline any part that is confusing to you right now. Pray for God to reveal to you His character of love as He gives you a better understanding of that passage.

“God never made a promise that was too good to be true.”—Dwight L. Moody, 19th-century U.S. evangelist.

“It is not the oath that makes us believe the man, but the man the oath.”—Aeschylus, 5th-century B.C. Greek playwright.

“He is poor indeed that can promise nothing.”—Thomas Fuller, 17th-century English churchman and historian.
Sabbath
Do the What Do You Think? exercise if you have not done so before. Look at your responses. Did you identify anyone who consistently made promises to you and broke them? Perhaps you noted many more broken promises than there were promises that were kept. This seems to be human nature. We are constantly seeing promises broken, and breaking them ourselves. Sometimes circumstances prohibit us from doing what we have said we would. However, read Joshua 1:3-5, and see how God was willing to keep His word to the people of Israel and even more specifically, to carry out His promises to Moses through Joshua.

Sunday
Read the story of Rahab (Joshua 2). Look at it in the context of the promises that were made by the Israelites, by Rahab, and by God. Notice that all the promises were kept from and to each party involved. In the end, God was glorified through each promise.

Now read about the crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 3). When the ark of the covenant (which literally means “promise”!) is taken into the water, the Jordan at flood level pauses to allow the Israelites to pass unharmed into the Promised Land. What a wonderful reminder of the parting of the Red Sea, which none of these Israelites (except for Joshua) had experienced.

Monday
When you read Into the Story you will see that God is consistently telling His people that He will honor the promises made to Moses. Joshua understands this and in turn keeps the promises that Moses made to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manassah.

It is a matter of character to do what we say we will do. It is better to promise less in order to be able to keep the ones we do make. How does it glorify God when we keep the promises we make?

Tuesday
Read the Flashlight section. Do you think that it would be comforting or scary to have tangible evidence that God is always with you? The pillar of smoke and the pillar of fire were a testament to the promises that God made to His people that He would always be with them.

Note that at the end of the Flashlight paragraph it says that God would be with them if they kept His commandments. Even though they have a tough time keeping those things that He asked of them, we see God’s grace throughout the Old Testament as He does His best to stay in a covenant of love with His people. How have you seen His grace throughout your life?

Wednesday
Read the Punch Lines. Is there a particular verse to which you are drawn? Do you see any significance to the order in which they have been placed? What can we say about God’s promises through the history of salvation?

Write on an index card the verse that speaks most to you. Keep the card under your pillow to read before you go to bed at night and when you wake up each morning. Let it remind you of the constancy of God and His promises.

Thursday
Think of a time when you have made a promise to someone and have not been able to keep it. Ask yourself the following questions:

• Did I mean to break my promise?
• When I made it, did I honestly think I could keep it?
• Does it happen often that I cannot keep my promises?
• How seriously do I take promise-making?

List the last five things you have promised people. Attach a date to them so that you know if you are taking a long time to fulfill the promises or not. Then see how quickly you can get each of the promises fulfilled. Can you do it all today? Wouldn’t it feel good to have them “checked off”? Ask God to empower and motivate you by His grace.

Friday
Are promises important to you? They are obviously important to God. They are so important that He is willing to transfer His promises from people group to people group, and to entire nations. Those are big promises! Are there any promises that you have made that are a big deal in your life? Any promises that you are very determined to fulfill?

Think about those promises and what you have to do to fulfill them, and work toward that end. At the same time, spend some time in prayer that you might be a Christian of your word and honor God with the promises that you make to Him and to others.

this week’s reading*
Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 44.

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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

It was the dawning of a new day for Rahab, once a Canaanite prostitute, and now a part of the great Israelite nation. But what would God have in store for her as an alien in a land conquered by foreigners? We don’t know how long she lived in the Israelite camp before she married Salmon and started a family. But what we do know is that God had something very special in mind for this very special woman. “Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king” (Matthew 1: 5, 6, NASB).

This woman, who had more faith than the Israelite nation itself, who believed in a God not her own, was rewarded in a marvelous way. Although she did not live to see the day that David was crowned king, this woman was honored through history with being in the ancestry of King David and of the Messiah.

Behind the walls of that evil city was a woman with faith, with a belief in the power of God. It saved her. And that same belief will save us. Maybe we as Adventists should search in the unexpected places for people who are ready to hear the truth. People like Rahab.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Discover the power of faith and what it does in people’s lives as shown in the life of Rahab. (Know)

• Sense that there is more than just thinking there is a God; one must have faith that He can do the impossible once one puts their life in His hands. (Feel)

• Take the opportunity to put their trust wholly in God, then watch Him work! (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Grace

• Conviction

• Trustworthiness/betrayal

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Many years ago there was a Frenchman. This Frenchman had a high-strung talent, a very unique talent. He was a tightrope walker, but not just any ordinary tightrope walker; this man did tricks on the tightrope. Blindfolded, he could push a wheelbarrow across a tightrope and not miss a step. An American promoter heard about him, was impressed and wrote
the Frenchman a letter saying that if he would come to America, he would pay him a large sum of money to walk on a tightrope over Niagara Falls. The Frenchman had never been to America, nor had he seen the falls, but he agreed to the deal quite gladly.

The promoter didn’t really believe the man could do it, but he set up the equipment and finally the day came for the big event. Crowds had gathered, and drums rolled as the man, “tightly” blindfolded, began walking across the rope that stretched across the falls, from the American side to the Canadian side!

He finished the walk with ease and then asked the promoter if he now believed that he could do it. The American said that of course he believed; he had just seen him do it. But the Frenchman was not satisfied. He asked again if the man really believed. Again the man said that he did. “Good,” the Frenchman answered, “then get into the wheelbarrow.”

How many times do we say that we believe God, yet are reluctant to get into the wheelbarrow? Still, He works such great things in the lives of those who do put their trust in Him.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

When God honors people, He honors them well. While to outside eyes it might seem that Rahab is a woman of doubtful character, God knew her character and the strength of her faith. Think of what faith has done and still does in people’s lives. What does it take to have faith like that? What does the word “faith” mean? How does it affect your life? How does it affect those around you?

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- Why do you think that the Israelite spies came to Rahab’s house?
- Was it just faith that saved Rahab? Or more?
- Is there another case in the Bible of a Canaanite woman becoming a part of the Israelite nation? Was hers also a case of faith? How did God honor her?
- Have you seen someone risk their reputation for their faith? Their life?

- What does the story tell you about the character of Rahab? Of God?

There are many things in this story that are unusual; it should be easy for the students to point them out. As they make their observations, discuss a little deeper the implications and outcomes of the situation. Use this as an opportunity to take the discussion into these areas:

1. Notice that the spies went directly to Rahab’s house; there was no dillydallying in looking for a respectable place to stay. The men must have known that to stay in another man’s house would arouse suspicion and create a dangerous situation, whereas two strangers staying in a prostitute’s house wouldn’t be all that unusual. It was safer to stay with her than anywhere else.

2. A big question has arisen from this particular story: Is it OK to lie in a life-and-death situation? Rahab lied to save the men’s lives, but in the Bible lying about anything is a sin. Are there times when you can compromise? Or is it just black and white? Could God have protected the spies even without Rahab lying? (Don’t discuss this in depth—it can go into a big discussion—but do bring it to the group’s attention.)
ing a prostitute was a different matter. There are two instances in the Bible that stand out the most: that of Hosea’s wife, a prostitute, and that of Rahab, who married Salmon. Read the story of Hosea and his wife in Hosea, chapter 1, and discuss why God directed him to marry a prostitute.

3. While the passage in Into the Word is about Rahab’s initial meeting with the spies, this week’s Scripture story and the commentary from Patriarchs and Prophets are about the complete fall of Jericho, including the sin of Achan (Joshua 7). The following passage from the Bible Background Commentary gives some interesting information regarding the total destruction that God commanded for Jericho.

“The ‘ban’ is sometimes chosen as the English word to represent the concept of total destruction that is commanded here in verse 2 and elaborated on in verses 5-6. Just as there were some types of sacrifices that belonged entirely to the Lord while others were shared by priest and offerer, so some plunder was set aside as belonging solely to the Lord. Just as the whole burnt offering was entirely consumed on the altar, so the ban mandated total destruction. Since the warfare was commanded by Yahweh and represented His judgment on the Canaanites, the Israelites were on a divine mission with Yahweh as their commander. Since it was His war, not theirs, and He was the victor, the spoil belonged to Him. Although the divine warrior motif occurs throughout the ancient Near East, the הֵרֶם concept is more limited—the only other occurrence of the term is in the Moabite Mesha inscription, but the idea of total destruction is also in the Hittite material. Some sites, such as Gezer, feature a distinct burn layer in association with the Late Bronze period. Under siege conditions sanitation is at its worst and disease is often rampant. The practice of burning everything after the defeat of a city thus also had an element of health connected to it. The best analogy for us to understand הֵרֶם is to think in terms of radiation. A nuclear explosion would destroy many things and irradiate much more. The abhorrence and caution with which we would respond to that which has been irradiated is similar to what is expected of the Israelites regarding things under the ban. If radiation were personified, one could understand that once something was given over to it, it was irredeemable. It was this condition that Achan exposed himself to by taking things under the ban.”

III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words. There are times when you can’t “judge a book by its cover,” or tell what kind of character someone has by their reputation, their occupation, or their looks.
Have the students write down the kinds of people they want to reach out to this week. Perhaps the homeless man on the street, or the angry kid at school.

**Summary**

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Rahab’s story is both powerful and touching. It gives hope to the people who have messed up the most, and it shows others that maybe there is more to a person than meets the eye. When God reached out to Rahab, He reached out to the many other people who are in her situation today, or worse. He reached out to those who look down on “those kinds of people,” hoping to give us the message that He loves everyone, and that no matter who someone is or what they do, they are His child.

Rahab’s story challenges us to have faith: “If a prostitute had faith like that, so can I!” Her faith saved so many lives; maybe your faith will lead you to save lives. With faith in God you can do the impossible, and reach out to the impossibilities.

**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Debriefing**

There are many activities and object lessons that can create an experience for students that will tie the point of the lesson firmly in their minds. The key to tying the experience to the learning that is desired is appropriate debriefing.

In this lesson “trust” could be experienced through the following short, hands-on activity. Have two volunteers stand up, one behind the other. Tell the person in front to close their eyes and slowly fall backward without bending their knees, trusting the person behind to catch them. (Note: It is easier to catch someone who trusts and stays straight than to catch someone who does not trust and buckles or flails around.) When several pairs have tried this, debrief the experience by asking the following types of questions:

- **Reflect**: Questions that help them reflect on their experience. (How did it feel when . . . ?)
- **Interpret**: Questions that help them interpret the experience. (Why was it more difficult when . . . ?)
- **Apply**: Questions that help them apply what they learned from the experience to their lives. (What are ways that we . . . ?)

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 45.

*A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about Beginning of the End at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.*
“God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much in their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf. He will help His believing children in every emergency if they will place their entire confidence in Him and faithfully obey Him” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 493).

“The city [Jericho] shall be under the ban, it and all that is in it belongs to the Lord; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.” (Joshua 6:17, NASB)
Rahab’s profession as a prostitute is a bit of a shock, especially when she is honored with being mentioned in Jesus’ genealogy. Are there some people today who, because of their professions or previous actions, are thought unworthy of being lights for God?

List some of these professions on a piece of paper and then number them from worst to not so bad.

Also, check out Ruth, who may have been shunned for her nationality (Ruth 1:22; 4:13); Tamar, who dressed up as a prostitute in order to have an heir to carry on the family name (Genesis 38:24); and Esther, who hid her identity and married a Gentile king (Esther 2:10).

Rahab’s profession was a bad one, at least in the Israelite society. Sleeping with a man that was not your husband was a great crime for women; girls who did so were stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:20-24). And if the girl was from a priest’s family the punishment was even worse. Rahab was, of course, a professional prostitute, but she still would have been looked down upon in the Israelite community. It’s rather surprising that under these circumstances Rahab is honored in the Bible when she would have been so looked down upon by that society.
How would you describe Rahab: wise or foolish? smart or stupid? loyal or a traitor? Explain your answers.
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
What would you have done if you had been Rahab? What would you have done if you were the spies?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
List the “out of the ordinary” events that occurred in this story:
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
How did God honor Rahab for what she did that day? (See Matthew 1:5.)
__________________________________________________________________________
Why was she honored? (See Hebrews 11:31.)
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
Of what event in Israel’s history does the scarlet cord remind you? (See Exodus 12:12, 13.)
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
How are we saved from our “doomed neighborhood”? (See Romans 5:1, 2.)
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
punch lines

“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace” (Hebrews 11:31, NASB).

“In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?” (James 2:25, NASB).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NASB).

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1, 2, NASB).

“Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Galatians 2:16, NASB).

“All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th-century U.S. poet.

“Christ came to save all through His own person.”—Irenaeus, 1st-century bishop of Lyons, in his Against Heresies.

“It is because of faith that we exchange the present for the future.”—Fidelis of Sigmaringen, 15th-century lawyer and philosophy teacher.
Sabbath
Take a look at Rahab’s plea for mercy in Joshua 2:9-13. Rahab’s plea about honoring God and then pleading for her salvation is similar to the prayer of Daniel, when he is pleading for the lives of his people. In fact, this was the way all the Israelites prayed when in need of help. Read Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9; notice how he starts the prayer: by honoring God. List the similarities and differences between Daniel’s plea and Rahab’s (Joshua 2:9-13).

Similarities:

Differences:

Monday
In the Flashlight section of this week’s lesson, Ellen White brings an issue to our attention. The Israelite nation as a whole had gone through times when they trusted more in themselves than in God. In fact, their lack of faith in God and their trust in themselves set them back a whole forty years, which they spent wandering around in a dry desert! Some land of milk and honey! The fertile land of Canaan could have been theirs, except for their inability to have faith in God.

Read the story of their misfortune in Numbers 14. What warning can you heed for your life?

Tuesday
In Monday’s lesson Israel’s lack of trust was mentioned. It’s interesting to note that Rahab was saved by her faith in God; quite the opposite from Caleb and Joshua’s generation, who wandered around in the wilderness until they all died. Read the Punch Lines for this week and notice the ones dealing with faith. Which one speaks to you the most?

Wednesday
This week’s lesson is indeed a fascinating one; a bit puzzling, too. Make a list of all the things that are out of the ordinary. Then read the story for yourself! You can find it in Joshua chapters 2 and 6. Look up “Rahab” in Ellen White’s writings and see what else you come up with!

Thursday
Read Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 45, “The Fall of Jericho.” In this chapter are described the trials and victories that the Israelites had because of their faith. When they didn’t follow God, and instead followed their own plans, they failed miserably, and lives were lost. But when they trusted in God and had faith in His power as Rahab did, they were victorious! Faith is so crucial in life. You can’t survive without it!

Can you think of circumstances in your life in which you followed your own plan and failed? or when you trusted in God and were victorious?

Friday
This week we have been talking a lot about trust, faith, and our salvation by grace through faith. It is God’s grace, and the faith in that grace, that saves us (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Read Romans 5 and see how God saves even the most sinful of sinners if they just believe in Him. Like Rahab, we have the evidence of what God can do if we trust Him, and like her, we ought to give Him a chance.


**this week’s reading**

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 45.

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I. SYNOPSIS

What we do after our successes is as much a test of our character as how we respond to our failures. Indeed, success may be even more devastating in that it tends to give one a false sense of security. Such was the dilemma that faced the Israelites as they stood on a plain facing Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

They had been summoned there by Joshua immediately following their (God’s) conquest of Ai. If we are to be quite candid, not many of us would have been ready for a worship service following the defeat of a puny enemy who got the best of us before. We would probably be plundering their riches, dancing all over their carcasses, and enjoying a massive celebration. But this was not how Joshua chose to spend the first few moments of his triumph. No, the partying would wait, the celebrations would be placed on hold.

Instead, Joshua 8:30-35 recounts the awesome spectacle of an entire nation—men, women, children, aliens—gathered before two mountains to honor their God, and to get their marching orders before fully possessing the Promised Land. Joshua never forgot the dying words of Moses to him (Deuteronomy 27:1-7). Joshua was to remind the people of the blessings that would attend their obedience to God, and the curses that would haunt them should they disobey. Joshua did not fail Moses. He read all the words of the law to them, and did not miss one.

As Ellen White notes, God intended for His people to get explicit direction on His expectations that they might avoid the snares of Satan in their new home. This story demonstrates in stark relief the love of God for His people. Not only is He willing to deliver from physical peril; He is equally willing to save His people from spiritual ruin. God always gives us the knowledge and power to overcome. It is up to us, as it was the Israelites, to listen and obey.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Know that God keeps every promise that He makes to His people.
• Experience the joy of returning love to God through faithfulness to His covenant. (Feel)
• Be encouraged to make positive choices to serve God in every facet of their lives. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• War
• Sin/evil/devil
• Worship

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.
students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• What specific things did God do to help Israel win their battle with Ai? Ask the students if they think it’s fair for God to help one side and not the other.

• Why did God encourage Israel to utterly destroy Ai, except for its plunder and livestock (Joshua 8:1, 2, 8)? (See the note in last week’s Sharing and Context on Joshua 6:21-24.)

• There were no doubt women and children among those killed at Ai. What do we say to those who point to this episode as proof that the Christian God is not a God of love? In Joshua 8:18 the Lord tells Joshua to “Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city” (NIV). Why did God ask Joshua to do this? What lesson might God have been trying to convey to Joshua? What did this act say to the Israelites about Joshua as leader? In this narrative we must remember that the shadow of Moses still loomed large over the nation of Israel.

• Joshua is careful to follow all of Moses’ directions concerning the covenant renewal ceremony. Why is he so concerned that every detail be right? How did this show respect for God and for his mentor, Moses? What does this say to us about how we should respect those who have served God faithfully in the past?

• How do you think the Israelites felt as they stood listening to Joshua? Could the children and youth in the Israelite congregation appreciate this ceremony? After all, it lacked all the things that seemed to appeal to young people today. Would youth today enjoy such a ceremony? Explain.

Use the following teachable passage to deepen the understanding of what Joshua read in the Israelites’ hearing: Deuteronomy 27 and 28. Ahead of time, select specific passages from these chapters to be read responsively or in rounds by the students.

Sharing Context and Background
Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. **Superpower Blues**. When Israel finally reached the Promised Land of Canaan, they were a bud-
gaining superpower. Everyone feared them, and this sense of invincibility went to their heads. Joshua 7:1-5 should be a lesson to all who forget God and tolerate sin. They went up to Ai with a token force and they were routed and chased all the way back home. Verse 1 tells us why they failed: “But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord’s anger burned against Israel” (NIV).

2. Only One Way. The Mosaic law, which God gave Moses to guide the day-to-day lives of the Jewish nation, was never meant to be a works-oriented means to salvation. The sacrificial services were meant to show that only the spilled blood of an innocent victim could pay the price for sin. The sanctuary service pointed to the day when Christ would come and lay down His life for the sins of the world (John 3:16). Sometimes we have a tendency to think that if we obey everything God says that ought to be enough to get us to the kingdom. Not! We will always need Jesus, for only His righteousness pays the price.

3. The Big Ten. Some erroneously claim that it was the Ten Commandments that were abolished at the death of Jesus, along with the sacrificial system. Such a view begs the question: Are we now free to have false gods, murder, steal, commit adultery, dishonor our parents, etc? The answer, of course, is no. Here’s the truth from God’s Word: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19, NIV).

4. Amen Corner. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary notes that the spot where Israel assembled for the renewal of the covenant was the same place where Abraham erected his first altar in the Land of Promise. “Here the people now congregated, six of the tribes on one side and six on the other—the six on Mt. Gerizim to respond with an Amen after each blessing was read and the six on Mt. Ebal as each curse was read” (vol. 2, p. 215).

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Give each student an index card and a pencil. Ask...
the students to choose one blessing from Deuteronomy 28 or 29 that they would like to experience in their lives this week. Ask them to write one sentence detailing what they plan to do to fulfill the conditions to receive this blessing from God.

Offer a prayer of dedication to God, asking Him to send His power and grace to each student in their attempts to obey His commands this week.

**Summary**

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God loves us. The creation shouts it, in spite of how sin has ravished it. Our own bodies tout it, in spite of what we do to them. God loves humanity. How much? Enough to send Jesus to die for us. After all that God has done for us, is our obedience too high a price to pay for His grace?

The question of our response to God’s goodness is at the heart of Joshua 8. Joshua 7 taught us that disobedience has consequences, but so does obeying God. There is no obedience that doesn’t flow from a heart of love. It was love that drove Joshua and the Israelites to assemble for this solemn covenant renewal ceremony. They had journeyed long, endured much. This was not the time to forsake the God who only hours earlier had handed them a decisive victory over Ai.

No, this was the time to declare one’s willingness to live for God, to live by His rules as a demonstration of the love they felt for Him. With great joy God must have watched this scene. He knew even then that some would forget this day, would fall back into old habits and old ways. But God still took joy in the effort of His very human subjects to please Him.

We too may be weak, we may fall, our promises may not be worth the paper they’re written on, but because of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can obey God.

**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

I Promise

Ask a guest to come and share with the class an episode from their life when they made a promise and kept it, or made a serious promise and broke it. You may also have such a story to share.

Often students will respond much more positively to a guest who comes to share a personal testimony that embodies the lesson for the day, perhaps someone who is not from the youth ministry of the church or in their general orbit. This person might also share their testimony in lieu of the provided illustration.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 46.

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flashlight

“Satan is ever at work endeavoring to pervert what God has spoken, to blind the mind and darken the understanding, and thus lead men into sin. This is why the Lord is so explicit, making His requirements so very plain that none need err. God is constantly seeking to draw men close under His protection, that Satan may not practice his cruel, deceptive power upon them” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 503).

"There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which he had written. All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the Lord, facing those who carried it—the priests, who were Levites." (Joshua 8:32, 33, NIV)
what do you think?

When was the last time that you sang your national anthem or repeated a national pledge of allegiance? Did you do it individually or did you do it with a group of other people? Finish the following statement by choosing from the list below: The reason why I sing my nation’s national anthem and repeat its pledge is to:

- Prove that I know it, so my parents and teachers will not hassle me.
- Practice for the day when I join the military.
- Show my patriotism and my allegiance to laws and values of my nation.
- Show my government’s leadership that I am willing to do anything they want me to do.

Does God have an anthem or pledge that He’d like us to recite? Briefly write what you think should be included in God’s pledge:

____________________________
____________________________
____________________________

INTO THE STORY

Joshua assembled the people of God in front of two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim. They each had a very unique layout and terrain. The name Ebal means rocky, and this description is accurate. Gerizim, unlike Ebal, is lush and beautiful. Both had a significant role to play on the day that Joshua called the people to the mountains. Ebal represented the curses that would follow Israel if they forsook God, and Gerizim demonstrated the blessings that would attend God’s people if they remained faithful.

All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the Lord, facing those who carried it—the priests, who were Levites.

Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel.

“Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses—just as it is written in the Book of the Law.

There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.”

(Joshua 8:30-35, NIV)
**punch lines**

“**He himself bore** our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24, NIV).

“**Those who belong** to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24, NIV).

“**The Lord will fight** for you; you need only to be still” (Exodus 14:14, NIV).

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV).

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21, NIV).

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine . . .” (Exodus 19:5, NIV).

“Sin is not hurtful because it is forbidden, but it is forbidden because it is hurtful.”
—Benjamin Franklin, 18th-century U.S. statesman, scientist, philosopher, printer, writer, and inventor.

“If Christians want us to believe in a Redeemer, let them act redeemed.”
—Voltaire, 18th-century French philosopher and writer.

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**OUT OF THE STORY**

What huge battle took place prior to the assembly at Ebal and Gerizim? (See Joshua 8:1-29.)

What was especially significant about this battle?

Underline the verses of the passage printed here that show how much Joshua cared about God’s laws.

What role is Moses playing in this ceremony? What is his unique contribution?

Circle all the people assembled on the mountain.

Why do you think God wanted all the children to be a part of this ceremony?

Does God still tell His people what blessings and curses will follow them depending on their choices? If so, how? Can you locate verses in the Bible that substantiate your answer?

Draw a rectangle around the sentence or sentences that are the core of this narrative.
Sabbath

In the What Do You Think? exercise you were asked to write what you thought might be included in a pledge given by God to us, or an anthem that He would want us to sing. Read Joshua 8:32. Why was Joshua so keen on getting all the words of the law written down?

We are told that Joshua called this holy assembly immediately after Israel conquered Ai. Why didn’t Joshua let the people relax a bit before enshrining the law in stone? How important are God’s commands in your life? Why not write a pledge of obedience to God right now?

Sunday

Read the story at the heart of this week’s lesson (Joshua 8:30-35). The Israelites were divided into two groups, each standing on one side of the ark and the priests who carried it. Why was the ark placed in the center, between the two groups of Israelites? The ark held God’s law, the Ten Commandments.

What place do the Ten Commandments occupy in your life? When was the last time you read them?

Monday

Look at this week’s Key Text. It tells us that Joshua copied the law of Moses on tablets of stone as the people watched. Can you imagine how long this might have taken? We do not know all of the logistics surrounding Joshua’s writing of the law, but Deuteronomy 27:1-8 tells us a little. Below, write what Joshua had to do to obey Moses’ directive.

What do you think would have happened if Joshua had decided to cut corners, to create the monument as cheaply and quickly as possible? What should be our attitude when we do things for God?

Tuesday

Read this week’s Flashlight section to shine a light on Satan and his schemes. Ellen White is careful to note that God is clear about His commands because Satan thrives when we either do not know what God expects of us and/or fail to obey God. Punishment is not God’s objective in giving us commands. God is really out to save our lives.

God spoke through Moses and Joshua to warn His people about curses that would follow sin, and blessings that would come as a result of obedience. Read Deuteronomy 28. List four blessings and three curses God promised His people.

Blessings for Obedience

Curses for Disobedience

Wednesday

Check out this week’s Punch Lines. Focus on Galatians 5:24: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (NIV). In your own words, write what you think it means to “crucify the sinful nature with its passions and desires”:

Read the other Punch Lines texts. What role does Jesus play in our struggle to obey God, to crucify the flesh? What role does God play? Finally, what can you do to cooperate with God’s plan to save you?

Thursday

Living among the Israelites who crossed the Jordan were aliens, people who joined them on their journey to the Promised Land. Notice that they were not excused from the big gathering in front of Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. The blessings and curses applied to them also.

How do you share your faith with friends who do not know God? Do you hide it or let it shine?

Friday

Worship. Everyone does it, whether they attend a church or not, listen to a preacher or not, pay tithe or not, eat the right foods or not, etc. It happens in ballparks, during elections, in bars and clubs, in the movies, in small towns and big cities—everywhere. Everyone worships someone or something. God wants it, and so does Satan.

Have you ever stopped to think of the reason why you worship God? Reflect on these questions today: Why do I worship God? Is it because I’m scared of Him? Is it because I like the stuff He gives me? Is it because I love Him? And if I love Him, does He know it?

this week’s reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 46.

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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

It is often said that experience is the best teacher. The episode found in Joshua 9 and 10 seems to fly in the face of this statement. Whether experience is or is not the best teacher is a debate for another day.

It was perhaps a few days earlier that Israel was forced to fight Ai a second time. Why a second time? Because Joshua and the other leaders of the nation failed to consult God before commencing battle with Ai (Joshua 7:1-4). This error led to the deaths of several Israelites and a humiliating defeat. With this backdrop, they renewed their covenant to God, promising to seek His wisdom and guidance before making any big decisions. They had promised to obey God.

Fast-forward a bit and we see them make the same mistake they made at Ai. The clever inhabitants of Gibeon, whose spies perhaps overheard the pledges the Israelites were making to God at Ebal and Gerizim to destroy all inhabitants of Canaan, came up with a perfect ruse. Dressed as paupers they approached Israel in search of help—and a treaty. Joshua sniffed the deception, but once again he failed to consult God. The Bible says they “asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord” (Joshua 9:14, KJV).

Israel signed the deceptive treaty, and the fallout was immediate. King Adoni-Zedek, then king of Jerusalem, confederated with five Amorite kings and plotted to move against the people of God. Why? He was incensed at the unconditional surrender of Gibeon without so much as a fight. Israel would have had to face these kings anyway, but certainly this was not God’s chosen way. When the kings moved against Gibeon to destroy it, Israel was forced to defend a nation whose people it barely knew, to honor a dishonorable agreement.

Following this debacle Israel obeys God and utterly destroys Adoni-Zedek and the five Amorite kings. In the signature event of this passage, God pauses time to allow His people to conquer their enemies (Joshua 10:12, 13). What a God! God had every right to let them perish at the hands of their enemies, but He does not respond like you or I would. He promised His people a place to call home, and He delivered—again.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Know that seeking God’s guidance in life is essential equipment for surviving earth.
• Feel the joy from knowing that God will move earth and heaven to come to their rescue.
• Respond by choosing to faithfully follow God until He takes us to heavenly Canaan.

III. EXPLORE

• Dependability
• Honesty
• Responsibility

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story
Share the following in your own words:

One thing is certain in an age of deception: those who remain dependable, honest, and trustworthy will be sought after. Now more than ever God is calling His people to be people of honesty and integrity. It must have been quite an example to the Gibeonites as they watched the Israelites come to their rescue in honor of a treaty, which they conceived in a lie.

Ellen White illumines the importance of the decision Israel made to honor the treaty. She writes: “The Gibeonites had pledged themselves to renounce idolatry, and accept the worship of Jehovah; and the preservation of their lives was not a violation of God’s command to destroy the idolatrous Canaanites. Hence the Hebrews had not by their oath pledged themselves to commit sin. And though the oath had been secured by deception, it was not to be disregarded. The obligation to which one’s word is pledged—if it does not bind him to perform a wrong act—should be held sacred. No consideration of gain, of revenge, or of self-interest can in any way affect the inviolability of an oath or pledge” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 506).

Out of the Story for Teachers
After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

1. Joshua 9:15 states that it was Joshua who entered into the faulty treaty with the Gibeonites. Did God punish Joshua? If not, why not? How was the battle fought against six kings and their armies a form of corporate punishment of Israel?

2. The Gibeonites chose the disguise of poor beggars to try to deceive the Israelites, and it worked. What was their punishment? Make the point that the punishments we bring on ourselves as a result of our choices are directly proportional to the seriousness of the wrong we have done.

3. Explore the topic of grace with your students. Where in this narrative, specifically Joshua 9, do we see God’s grace? At what points in the story...
do we see grace displayed by Israel? How are we to respond to those who do us wrong?

4. Israel’s treaty with Gibeon had a serious spiritual component. The Gibeonites had to give up whatever worship they previously engaged in and follow the dictates of Israel’s God. How do you think this worked in practice? Did the Gibeonites engage in the same ceremonies and sacrifices?

5. Do you think there was ever a time when the worship of Israel’s God became personal and real to the Gibeonites? Was there ever a time when they became converted?

6. The Gibeonites were relegated to serving as woodcutters and water carriers, furnishing the Jewish temple. How was this punishment a blessing in disguise?

7. In the subsequent battle against Adoni-Zedek and the Amorites, God figures prominently in the mix. At what points in the battle does God give Joshua specific verbal guidance? How was Joshua so sure that it was God who was guiding him and not some other voice?

8. Joshua and the Israelites utterly destroy all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all the Amorites. What is the difference between this violence and that which is performed by Christian and Islamic extremists who claim to be doing God’s bidding?

Use the following as more teachable passages: Deuteronomy 4:29; Proverbs 28:26; Matthew 17:20; Psalm 2:1, 2.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. **Huge Specimens.** In the Bible the Amorites are described as a powerful people of great stature. In Deuteronomy 3:11 we have a hint as to their towering height: “Only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaites. His bed was made of iron and was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide” (NIV). Og, the last of the Amorite kings, was no small man, and this can only hint at what the Amorites may have looked like to the Israelites.

   In spite of their awesome physical gifts, however, the Israelites utterly destroyed them, with God’s help and support.

2. **Gibeon Excavated.** According to Bibleplaces.com the ancient city of Gibeon has been found. “Excavated by James Pritchard 1956-62, Gibeon has significant remains especially from the days of the Israelites. Impressive among these finds are 63 wine cellars from the 8th-7th c. B.C. These cellars were bottle-shaped and about 6 feet deep and 6 feet in diameter at the bottom. It is estimated that 19,000 gallons of wine could have been stored in 9 gallon jugs in these cellars” (Source: www.bibleplaces.com/gibeon.htm).

   Historical records show that Gibeon was an important city, so important that at the time of Israel’s entry its unconditional surrender drew the ire of Adoni-Zedek, then king of Jerusalem.
3. **Democracy in Gibeon?** The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary notes: “The Gibeonite form of government must have been more or less democratic, for the Gibeonites spoke of their elders and all their people as sending them (verse 11). Had their government at this time been headed by a king, his heart might have been too proud to bow to the conquering Israelites. In that event the Gibeonites might have joined with the other Canaanite kings in resisting Israel” (vol. 2, p. 218).

What is for sure is this: “Their determination not to resist showed a degree of faith in the strength of Israel’s God. They were willing to enter into a league, which included their pledge to renounce idolatry and to accept the worship of Jehovah” (vol. 2, p. 218).

**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Mapping Territory**

To make this region come alive to your students, consider bringing in a map of what was ancient Canaan land. Sources such as Bible places.com and other sites will be helpful here.

There’s a good chance that your students have never examined the topography of a biblical area. They might enjoy seeing where the Jordan River is, Jericho, Ai, Gibeon, etc. To go even further, share information on who occupies the region today, and whether or not excavations have ever been done there. For instance, as mentioned previously, the site of ancient Gibeon has been located definitively.

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**III. CLOSING**

**Activity**

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Bring to class a photo of the most honest, trustworthy, and dependable person you know. Share with the students two reasons why you trust this person. Then give the students two minutes to come up with the person they trust the most. Ask class members to share their choices and the reasons why they trust that person.

**Summary**

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God’s plan for His people was that they enter Canaan, clear the land of its heathen inhabitants, serve Him faithfully, and be positive examples of godliness to surrounding nations. But God’s people often get sidetracked. The conquest of Canaan was never fully accomplished, even down to the time of Solomon, because the Israelites often depended on their own evaluation of situations on the ground, instead of listening to a clear word from God.

In Joshua 9 and 10 we see the roots of their later penchant for forgetting God. The treaty with Gibeon was a humbling experience, but all was not lost. In their acceptance of responsibility for the well-being of the Gibeonites they demonstrated a deep respect for the God by whom they had sworn their allegiance. God went on to lead them valiantly into and out of a great battle. He rained hailstones from heaven to support their ground attack. He even stopped the sun for a day.

The God who showed up that day is the same God we serve today, and we owe everything we are to Him.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 47.

*A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about Beginning of the End at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.*
“It was no light humiliation to those citizens of a ‘royal city,’ ‘all the men whereof were mighty,’ to be made hewers of wood and drawers of water throughout their generations. But they had adopted the garb of poverty for the purpose of deception, and it was fastened upon them as a badge of perpetual servitude. Thus through all their generations their servile condition would testify to God’s hatred of falsehood” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 507).

“The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.”

(Joshua 9:14, 15, NIV)
How can you tell when someone is lying to you? What signs do you usually look for?

____________________________________________
____________________________________________
____________________________________________

According to researchers at the Smell and Taste Treatment Research Foundation in Chicago, Illinois, the behaviors listed below are physical indicators that someone is being deceptive.

- Leaning forward
- Licking the lips
- Touching the nose
- Averting the gaze
- Handling objects

“Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kirjath Jearim. But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the Lord, the God of Israel.

“The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, but all the leaders answered, ‘We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them.’ They continued, ‘Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community.’ So the leaders’ promise to them was kept.”

“The Gibeonites then sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal: ‘Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us.’

“So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men. The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you.’

“After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. As they fled...
before Israel on the road
down from Beth Horon to Azekah,
the Lord hurled large hailstones down
on them from the sky, and more of them
died from the hailstones than were killed by the
swords of the Israelites."

(Joshua 9:1-4, 14-21; 10:6-11, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Who is seeking to deceive whom in this story? Why?
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

Place a check mark by the points in the story where Israel should have consulted with God. Place an X where they did consult with God.

Underline the deceptive words spoken by the Gibeonites.

Which parts of this story grab your attention?
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

Who are the main characters making important decisions for Israel?
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

Why did the Israelites decide to honor a treaty that was signed through deceptive means?
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

In the last paragraph, place an up arrow at the places where Joshua or Israel are doing something. Place a down arrow where God is doing something.

Notice the participation on both sides in winning the victory.

punch lines

“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment” (Proverbs 12:19, NIV).

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, NIV).

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43, 44, NIV).

“Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false” (Psalm 24:3, 4, NIV).

“But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God’s name will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced” (Psalm 63:11, NIV).

“Give up what appears to be doubtful for what is certain. Truth brings peace of mind, and deception doubt.”—Muhammad Ali, current U.S. boxer and activist.

“The greatest honor of a man is in doing good to his fellow men, not in destroying them.”—Thomas Jefferson, third president of the U.S. (1801-1809), author of the Declaration of Independence.
Sabbath

The "What Do You Think?" exercise focused on the physical cues people give off when attempting to mislead or tell an untruth. Obviously, Joshua and the Israelite princes missed the cues that the Gibeonites were exhibiting.

In Joshua 9:19 the Israelites got very upset with their leaders for making a treaty with a deceptive nation. Share a time in your life when you did something good for someone who had done you wrong.

Has someone ever extended kindness to you after you had done wrong?

Sunday

Read the "Into the Story" section of this week's lesson. Ellen White’s comments on Israel’s decision to honor its treaty with the Gibeonites is worth a closer look: "The Gibeonites had pledged themselves to renounce idolatry, and accept the worship of Jehovah; and the preservation of their lives was not a violation of God’s command to destroy the idolatrous Canaanites" (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 506).

It’s obvious that the Gibeonites converted to serving God out of fear for their lives (read Joshua 9:3-6). Does God desire forced worship, worship from folks who are scared of Him or His people?

Monday

The Key Text this week states clearly that Israel’s leaders failed to consult God before entering into their treaty with the Gibeonites. Israel honored its word, but a fearful punishment was pronounced on the Gibeonites. (See Joshua 9:21.)

The Israelite failure to seek God’s guidance started a chain reaction throughout the region. Read Joshua 10:1-4 to see what the king of Jerusalem decided to do following the humiliation of the Gibeonites.

Tuesday

Ellen White shines her Flashlight on the punishment meted out to the Gibeonites because of their deception. They came to Israel dressed like poor slaves. Because of their sin, they would remain poor servants forever. What a high price to pay for deception!

Do you think this was a fair punishment? Prepare an answer to share with the class.

Wednesday

The final selection in the list of Punch Lines reads: "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false" (Psalm 24:3, 4, NIV).

What do you think is meant by “clean hands”? What do you think it means to have a “pure heart”?

Thursday

Read Joshua 10 today. It is perhaps one of the most violent chapters in the Bible. God had given His people a clear directive to destroy all the heathen nations of Canaan. But God also gave us the sixth commandment, which states: “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13, NIV). Is God contradicting Himself?

We do not now, and may never, understand the reason for everything God chooses to do or not do in regard to sin and evil on this earth. We are, however, assured that “the Spirit of God inspired Joshua’s prayer, that evidence might again be given of the power of Israel’s God. . . . Joshua had received the promise that God would surely overthrow these enemies of Israel, yet he put forth as earnest effort as though success depended upon the armies of Israel alone. He did all that human energy could do, and then he cried in faith for divine aid. The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 509).

Friday

This week’s study challenges us to be people of truth, honesty, and integrity; to honor the oaths we make even when others are less than honest with us. But, on a deeper level, this week’s lesson asks a far more challenging question: What are some of the consequences of failing to seek God’s guidance in every area of life?

Reflect on this question as you thank God for His grace, His willingness to still work with us though we sometimes forget about Him.

This week’s reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 47.

* A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Joshua is a book of high drama—and careful recordkeeping. It’s a bit like reading the Sunday paper from cover to cover—sections A and B crackle right along, starting out with a city-toppling, sun-stopping bang, but by the time you reach section E you had better really be interested in real estate.

So what use is an ancient geography lesson? As a follow-up to the forestalled promises of Moses’ books, plenty. For the book’s original readers, the message is clear: Stay faithful to God, and He’ll be faithful to what He’s promised you. And in the settling down of the Israelites in their long-awaited land, there are lessons to learn about relationships, trust, God’s grace, faith in action, and brotherly love.

The story begins with the Israelites on the move, routing one city-state after another in a God-directed sweep. Then a charming and soul-stirring flashback: old (and we do mean old, but hold on) Caleb saying to Joshua, “Mind if I take another go at that spot we scouted out together a generation ago? I’m just as sharp as I was as a young buck, and with God’s help I’m still ready to roll.”

That kind of sanctified bravado couldn’t help bringing a lump to Joshua’s throat, and he bade Caleb Godspeed. If anyone deserved an easy retirement it was Caleb, but Caleb wouldn’t think of it. Caleb conquered Hebron, driving out the three sons of Anak, and pushed on to claim a few more towns for good measure.

Then there are the cities of refuge, each strategically located within half a day’s journey of anywhere in Israel. Ellen White writes that God didn’t yet choose to abolish the custom of vigilante justice, but He appointed these cities, that no one should be executed for an accidental murder or on the testimony of but one witness. The inadvertent murderer was safe as long as he remained within the city’s walls.

The story of the Gadites’ and Reubenites’ altar is a cautionary tale of snap judgments within a community, yet with a happy ending (and, alas, the last such happy ending the Bible will offer for a while).

These tales of Israel’s celebrations and challenges give us plenty to chew on. Lead your students to discover points such as these:

- God will empower us when we follow His Spirit’s leading.
- Grace tempers our actions against those who have done us wrong, and Christ is our shelter as long as we remain in Him.
- We must avoid rash judgments of others’ motivations. Hurling accusations is Satan’s trait (Revelation 12:10, NIV, calls him “the accuser of our brothers,” and the Greek word diabolos means “slanderer”).

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Know that God desires His people to be bold, yet humble; fearless, yet patient.
- Feel the courage of Caleb, the surety of Christ as shelter, and the urgency of unity.
- Respond by making application of these stories’ principles to contemporary situations.
bly haven’t been attending very long. People fight innovation for all sorts of reasons, but the biggest reason is fear—fear that something spiritual will be lost in the transition.

This week’s lesson tells tales of people trying to do something new—and those trying to make sure the community doesn’t lose its way. It tells of people jumping to conclusions, and God instituting safeguards to protect those who could be hurt—be they those trying to honor God in their own way, or someone who has accidentally killed a person. And in the story of Caleb, we find someone whose love and zeal for God knew no fear.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story
Share the following in your own words:
An old cartoon shows a dog having finally “caught” the family car after a few thousand chases down the driveway. The caption? “Now what?” You won the trophy. You’ve got the guy or girl. You reached the Promised Land. It’s where movies end—and real life begins. Unlike a Disney movie, happily ever after requires more than just good wishes and singing fishes. And it’s not always pretty.

The ancient Israelites faced all manner of growing pains when they finally reached Canaan. God promised to empower them in everything—but that meant setting them free. It was time for the Israelites to grow up or go bust. Manna no longer fell from the sky, so there were fields to hoe and crops to sow. New temptations beckoned, but the greatest remained: the temptation to forget just Who had brought them that far.

Out of the Story for Teachers
After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31, NIV). If salvation is so simple, why is it so hard to accept that God is looking out for us? Why do people struggle with fear that they won’t make it to heaven after all? What’s salvation all about, anyway?

The cities of refuge provide us with an illuminating illustration of salvation. We’re all guilty of murder—the murder of Jesus Christ, Son of God. And yet there is a city of refuge—the very same Person, our Creator and Redeemer, Jesus. If we try to defend ourselves, we’ll
end up victims of the devil’s vengeance, but if we throw ourselves at Jesus’ mercy, our protection and salvation are assured.

That’s grace—grace at its purest and simplest. And yet there’s another question: How then shall we live? It’s a deep subject, and several books in the New Testament explore the topic. Have the students take turns reading from Romans 6:2-14.

That’s the mystery and beauty of abiding in Christ. God’s grace doesn’t just cover our sins—it empowers us to live lives that reflect Christ’s love.

Discuss with your students what the ideas of Jesus’ sacrifice, Jesus’ offer of forgiveness and salvation, and “abiding in Christ” mean to them. Do they wrestle with the assurance of salvation? Are they confused about grace, about whether or not they must somehow contribute to and “earn” their salvation? Discuss how when we walk with Christ daily, deepening our relationship with Him, the Holy Spirit will guide us in all we do so that others may see Christ in us—not so that we will be saved, but because of it, and so that others may be saved through our witness.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

When thousands died in the desert, Caleb survived to enter the Promised Land. The essential difference? A positive attitude. After the people rebelled at Kadesh-Barnea, God considered striking them all down and just sticking with Moses’ descendants. When Moses interceded for the Israelites, God declared, “Not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who dis-obeyed me and tested me ten times—not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their fore-fathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. But because my servant Caleb has a differ-ent spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it” (Numbers 14:22-24, NIV).

Caleb’s “let’s trust God and go for it” attitude is an inspiration to us today as we seek to stand for God. There will always be obstacles, especially if we look and focus on them, but a prayerful attitude sees opportunities for God to be glorified.

The cities of refuge remind us of the importance of abiding in Christ. The idea has led many to legalism, but the reality is that we’re invited to enter into Christ’s rest—a refuge from works-oriented religion, of thinking we must handle life on our own. Ellen White wrote: “There is need of constant watchfulness, and of earnest, loving devotion; but these will come naturally when the soul is kept by the power of God through faith. . . . God will accept every one that comes to Him, trusting wholly in the merits of a crucified Saviour. Love springs up in the heart. . . . Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure” (Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 353, 354).

Ellen White describes the life in Christ as a life of transforming rest. “The conscience will find rest in

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
Christ. He is ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ As we believe Him, we are changed into His likeness. His image is engraved on the heart. His love is reflected to the world in our words and deeds. Thus is revealed to the world the power that truth has to sanctify the receiver. Under the bright, glorious beams of Christ’s righteousness, the human soul is made pure and holy” (Southern Watchman, July 9, 1903, par. 2).

The controversy over the unexpected altar brought back memories of the apostasy at Baal-Peor, when Israelites were led into sexual immorality and death, and of Achan’s theft, when one man’s sin brought disaster to all of Israel. The Israelites were “once burnt, twice shy,” and eager to defend the community from backsliding and idolatry. Fortunately Phinehas and the elders demonstrated what business and family expert Stephen Covey calls one of the “seven habits of highly effective people”—“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Because they didn’t rush to judgment, not only was tragedy averted, but a beautiful harmony among people and a tribute to God was revealed.

III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Ask the students to list the personal qualities that came through in this week’s stories of Caleb and the leaders who dealt with the crisis of the Reubenites’ and Gadites’ altar. What qualities of Caleb kept Israel moving forward, and what qualities of Phinehas and the other elders kept Israel from falling apart? (Examples include that both were patient, didn’t rush to judgment, and were willing to look at issues from somebody else’s viewpoint.)

If anyone deserved to “rest on his laurels,” it was Caleb. Tell your students to consider, as they go on, what new fields in their lives God may have for them to obtain.

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:

An 85-year-young man’s patience rewarded.
Protection from punishment and rest in Christ. A disaster averted thanks to openhearted patience and the Holy Spirit’s guidance. These interlocking themes present a picture of the gospel—not just in theory, but road-tested, demonstrating how it shapes our attitudes and relationships.

A realistic view of the Christian life recognizes that it is neither just floating along on a breeze nor a constant struggle for God’s acceptance. Life brings challenges, but the love of God brings both assurance and empowerment. We must rise to life’s challenges and meet them with a desire to bring God glory.

**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Role-Playing**

Role-playing is an important component in applying what one learns. It probably won’t be difficult for your students to think of examples they’ve seen of controversies similar to the Reubenites’ and Gadites’ altar. Guide them through a consideration of what both parties wanted in the Bible story—the other 10 tribes wanted to be sure that God was not being dishonored, and the two and a half tribes wanted to be sure their geographic separation didn’t cause them to forget what they stood for.

Then help them consider controversy “closer to home,” and the guidelines this story suggests.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 48.

*A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about Beginning of the End at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.*
“[Caleb] did not ask for himself a land already conquered, but the place which above all others the spies had thought it impossible to subdue. . . . To each was given according to his faith. The unbelieving had seen their fears fulfilled. Notwithstanding God’s promise, they had declared that it was impossible to inherit Canaan, and they did not possess it. But those who trusted in God, looking not so much to the difficulties to be encountered as to the strength of their Almighty Helper, entered the goodly land” (Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 512, 513).
Do you agree or disagree with the following?
___ 1. It’s better to try and fail than to have never tried at all.
___ 2. The most well-intentioned effort will ultimately fail without God’s blessing.
___ 3. Even the flattest pancake has two sides.
___ 4. General unity is more important than absolute unanimity.
___ 5. You can’t be too careful.
___ 6. If we attend church and don’t do anything too sinful, our salvation is secure.
___ 7. There’s no sin God can’t forgive.
___ 8. We should be patient and considerate even with those who attack us.

For the items you agreed with, tell how that principle can be applied to life.
_____________________________
_____________________________
_____________________________
_____________________________

Joshua blessed Caleb . . . and gave him Hebron as his inheritance.

“Then the Lord said to Joshua: ‘Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, . . . so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood. When he flees to one of these cities, he is to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state his case before the elders of that city. Then they are to admit him into their city and give him a place to live with them. If the avenger of blood pursues him, they must not surrender the one accused, because he killed his neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought. He is to stay in that city until he has stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then he may go back to his own home in the town from which he fled.’”

“So the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan to return to Gilead, their own land. [They] built an imposing altar there by the Jordan. And when the Israelites heard [about it] the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them.

“They said to them: ‘. . . How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now?’”

“[They replied] ‘We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours, “What do you have to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? The Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you—you Reubenites and Gadites! You have no share in the Lord.” . . . That is why we said, “Let us get ready and build an altar—but not

Christians in the Middle Ages designated churches as places of sanctuary for those accused of crimes. An accused criminal could throw himself at the mercy of a church, and would have 40 days to either stand trial under local authorities, or confess and go into exile, leaving the country.

While King James I officially abolished churches as asylums in 1623, persecuted people have turned to churches as sanctuary throughout the ages. This tradition took a tragic turn during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Eight thousand Tutsi Rwandans sought sanctuary at the Adventist complex in Mugonero, but nearly all were hacked to death on Sabbath morning, April 16. When people start to “look out for number one” and forget that how we relate to others reflects our relationship with Jesus (Matthew 25:40), tragedy is inevitable.
“The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior—from violent men you save me” (2 Samuel 22:2, 3, NIV).

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1, NIV).

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1, NIV).

“How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along! It’s like costly anointing oil flowing down head and beard, flowing down Aaron’s beard, flowing down the collar of his priestly robes. It’s like the dew on Mount Hermon flowing down the slopes of Zion. Yes, that’s where God commands the blessing, ordains eternal life” (Psalm 133:1-3, Message).

“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:22-24, NIV).

“In necessary things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity.”—Anne Baxter, 20th-century Academy Award-winning U.S. actress.

Sabbath
This week’s What Do You Think? has us ponder some advice, much of which you’ve probably heard before, and which is hard to remember when emotions are high. Read Joshua 22:10-34. How helpful are such principles in the “heat of the moment”? What kept the Israelites from going to war with one another over a big misunderstanding—and how important is levelheaded leadership?

Sunday
Read this week’s Out of the Story. Each question touches on some aspect of relationship and responsibility. What do this week’s stories teach us about our relationship with God? About how we should treat others? About the importance of not rushing to judgment? About standing up for what we believe in?

Monday
This week’s Key Text is a record of a promise kept. God made an incredibly generous offer to the Israelites: if they’d live for Him, He’d make their life worth living.

Jesus makes some incredible promises to us as well. Read Matthew 6:25-34. How do these promises compare to what God offered the Israelites? How can you relate to these promises in today’s topsy-turvy world? How would your life and attitude be different if you truly took these words seriously?

Tuesday
Self-fulfilling prophecies. Read this week’s Flashlight quote. Better yet, look up the complete reference in Patriarchs and Prophets. The Israelites at Kadesh Barnea thought the Canaanites were far too strong for them, and trembled at entering the Promised Land despite what they’d seen of God’s power. When they tried to redeem themselves by entering Canaan on their own, they met with disaster and death (Numbers 14:41-45), and most people thought, Sure enough—they were right—we’re doomed.

In much of life, attitude is everything. The Israelites’ self-defeating attitude led to defeat. Joshua’s courageous faithfulness brought God-powered success. What is God encouraging you to do? What giants are in your way? How can you avoid trying to succeed on your own? How can you focus on what God will do through you, and not just the obstacles in your way?

Wednesday
Read this week’s Punch Lines section. If there’s one thing God loves to do, it’s transform wretchedness to righteousness, hopelessness to happiness, despair to delight. God loves to take the most messed-up situation and recreate it into something beautiful. He offers a fresh start to anyone who asks, no matter how desperate things may seem on the surface.

Read the story of the woman anointing Jesus’ feet in Luke 7:36-47. What does this story tell us about how eager God is to redeem us, no matter how far we’ve fallen or how much we’ve messed up? How can it help us respond to people and things in our lives that tell us we’re beyond repair?

Thursday
The story of the Reubenites’ and Gadites’ misunderstood altar has important lessons for churches today. The tribes of Reuben and Gad just wanted to honor God; the other 10 tribes were afraid of disaster due to God’s being dishonored. What parallels do you see to modern church politics? How have churches you’ve known about handled similar controversies? What can we learn from how Phinehas and friends handled the situation?

Friday
It’s easy to say “I’ll follow God no matter what.” It’s another story when going forward with God may mean losing your friendships and security. Jesus made some promises to His followers that are 180 degrees from the promises the Israelites heard: “You will be persecuted. You will be betrayed.” Read Matthew 24:9-14, particularly noting verse 13—“But he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” How can we keep our faith and keep standing for God even when it brings us suffering? Is God asking too much of us? Can we ask too much of God? Christians throughout history have been willing to give their lives for Jesus. How do you think they felt God’s presence and power even as they were persecuted?


date this week’s reading*
Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 48.

*A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Talk about an elder statesman—according to biblical evidence, when Israel conquered Canaan Joshua was the oldest Israelite around. And what a life he’d lived! He had probably baked in the hot Egyptian sun slaving on Pharaoh’s projects; watched in awe as the 10 plagues brought a nation to its knees; celebrated salvation on the seashore; fought Amalekites in the desert; accompanied Moses partway up Mount Sinai; spied on the Promised Land; and four decades later led the Israelites to victory after victory in Canaan. When Joshua talked, people listened. In his farewell message Joshua reminded his people how God had led them, then cut to the chase: Serve God and prosper, or ignore Him and . . . disaster.

Joshua led the people in renewing their covenant with God, yet drew a clear line in the sand for them. Commitment is serious stuff, he insisted. God is a jealous God. He’ll settle for nothing less than all we have in us—our thoughts, our actions, our motives, our minds. He’s responsible for everything good that’s happened to us, and now He wants us to return the favor.

It was a high calling, but never forget that even this was rooted in grace. As God reminded the Israelites, “I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you. . . . You did not do it with your own sword and bow. So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant” (Joshua 24:12, 13, NIV).

In this lesson your students will explore such issues as:
- The dual deceptions of assuming God will overlook sin, and the idea that people can somehow be “good enough” to be saved.
- The importance of serving God out of love rather than “what’s in it for me” or fear of judgment.
- The surety that God will do as He’s promised.

II. TARGET

The students will:
- Know that God is faithful when we follow Him.
- Feel the call to serve God wholeheartedly, knowing that God is always eager to accept them no matter what.
- Respond by considering the choice Joshua offered.

III. EXPLORE

- Forgiveness from God
- Decision-making
- Priorities

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.
bling came from a casino.

The sad saga reminds us that, as Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24, NIV). Abramoff has pleaded guilty to conspiracy, fraud, and tax evasion, and the careers of his friends have been forever tarnished.

Like the story of Achan, Joshua’s farewell message reminds us that we can’t serve both God and the world—we must make a choice. While God’s grace is always available, we’ll live with the consequences and hamper God’s blessings if we try to live a double life, with one foot in God’s camp and another in the world’s.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words: “Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, and the walls came a-tumblin’ down.” Impressive stuff—but no less impressive than his legacy of a nation that gave its heart to God for two generations. Joshua laid it on the line: There are no two ways about it—are you going to follow God or do your own thing?

“Make your choice,” Joshua said. “You can follow the useless gods your ancestors worshipped, who did nothing for them, or you can follow God. I’m following God, and my family is too,” Joshua said. “How about you?”

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

In the oxymoron hall of fame, “forced love” ranks right up there with “pretty ugly” and “government organization.” By its very nature, love can’t be compelled. When Joshua echoed Moses’ call to follow God (see Deuteronomy 30), he wanted the Israelites to serve God willingly, as a natural response to God’s love for them.

Following God requires dedication and commitment. How did God recommend the Israelites maintain their focus on Him? Have a student read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21. Explain that even today people who strictly follow Judaism keep a small parchment, inscribed with the words from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21, attached to each of their doorposts. The
Worshipping Canaanite gods such as Baal or Asherah was a tricky, iffy business, but it definitely kept you busy. Problem was, the gods were just so hard to figure out. Sure the gods were powerful and amazing, but they were more finicky than a house cat and needed plenty of convincing. Canaanites believed their gods needed to be reminded regularly to take good care of them, to keep sending rain and sunshine in healthy amounts, to make their babies healthy, to keep their crops from being wiped out by a turn of the weather. Fertility was everything to the Canaanites, so their religious rituals always reminded the gods where food and babies came from.

You could never be sure what pleased the pagan gods, but God laid it out clearly for the Israelites. The Creator God didn’t need to be coaxed out of His celestial cave to help His people. Here at last was a God you could trust, could take at His word. God took the guesswork out of godhood by covenanting with people: You do this, and I’ll take care of you. I’ll watch out for you—in fact, I’ll lavish you with blessings you’ll have to see to believe. It was a religion based not on rituals, but on relationship.

The apostle John contrasted it this way: “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7, NIV).

scroll and the container it comes in is known as a mezuzah. Ask your students for their ideas about how we can apply this principle to our spiritual lives today.

Ask your students to give one-word reactions to the word “law.” Why does the law so often have such a negative connotation? How has the devil distorted people’s ideas of following God wholeheartedly? Have a student read Luke 18:18-23. How would a typical modern person relate to that story?

The Israelites loved God’s law. Divide your students into groups, each reading a different section of the lengthy Psalm 119. Have each group find reasons why Psalm 119’s author rejoiced in the law, and share their answers with the larger group. (Unless your group is particularly large, you probably won’t want to cover the entire psalm.) Answers might include that the law gives life, brings freedom, strengthens the spirit, keeps people from being selfish, etc.

Even so, people today have many distorted views of God’s laws. If possible, share your own testimony or have a guest tell how their view of God’s law changed as the Holy Spirit led them, and how God has blessed since they came to better understand Him. Challenge your students to live with a heavenly focus, as Jesus charged in the story of the rich young ruler.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

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Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

If we just live life looking for something “big” to happen, we’ll miss out. Life is made up of a lot of little seemingly small choices. Ellen White wrote: “We little know the bearing of our acts upon the experience of others. What we do or say may seem to us of little moment, when, could our eyes be opened, we should see that upon it depended the most important results for good or for evil” (Ministry of Healing, p. 483).

Challenge your students with the fact that living for God won’t begin at some distant date—it begins today. Challenge them to look for opportunities to make a difference in everything they do. As Carl Wilkins, a Seventh-day Adventist who saved lives during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, tells audiences today, each day every one of us has a chance to make a difference. “We have the opportunity. We have the ability. Even in small things, like picking up a piece of trash in the parking lot. . . . Do you do it? And you struggle back and forth in your mind. But if we don’t do the small things, we won’t do the large ones. . . . That’s when the most horrible things in the world happen. When good people do nothing.”

Make a difference.

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Joshua called his people to choose—or lose out. There was still much territory left to conquer, and complacency would only lead to calamity. The people would either move forward in faith, or drift into disaster.

Today a world awaits us that knows too little of God’s love, and needs us to demonstrate it. People wander lost without a clear understanding of God’s mercy, patience, forgiveness, and eagerness to transform us. Jesus offers new life to all who call on Him. Jesus calls us to live in joyful expectation of His soon return, and Matthew 25:34-36 tells us some of how we should spend our time as Christians in a broken world. It’s a no-compromise life of courage in the face of adversity, care and compassion for those shattered by sin, commitment to Christ’s principles of love and faithfulness, and creative expressions of God’s character.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 49.

*A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about Beginning of the End at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
“The aged leader urged the people to consider . . . and to decide if they really desired to live as did the degraded idolatrous nations around them. If it seemed evil to them to serve Jehovah, the source of power, the fountain of blessing, let them that day choose whom they would serve. . . . The gods of the Amorites had not been able to protect their worshipers. Because of their abominable and debasing sins, that wicked nation had been destroyed, and the good land which they once possessed had been given to God’s people. What folly for Israel to choose the deities for whose worship the Amorites had been destroyed! ‘As for me and my house,’ said Joshua, ‘we will serve Jehovah.’ . . . His appeals called forth the unhesitating response, ‘God forbid that we should forsake Jehovah, to serve other gods’” (Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 523, 524).
Consider the following multiple-choice questions. Which answers do you agree with?

Courage is:

a. The willingness to put everything on the line for what you believe.
b. An attitude that isn’t blocked by obstacles and pushes forward with faith.
c. The ability to focus on what’s truly important.

What tempted the Israelites to turn from God in Joshua’s time?

a. The Canaanite’s exotic religions.
b. Following God was just too complicated.
c. They got too comfortable in their new land.
d. They started thinking they could handle things themselves.

Joshua gathered the Israelites at Shechem, one of the cities of refuge, for his final message to them. Shechem was where Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery, and Joshua 24:32 (NIV) tells us that Joseph’s bones, brought from Egypt, were buried at Shechem “in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver.” Meeting in Shechem reminded the Israelites that they had come full circle—from settling in Egypt, to enslavement by jealous rulers, to providential escape, to finally settling again in the land God had promised half a millennium before. Joseph’s life story was the Israelites’ 500-year history in miniature—from favored son to enslavement to exalted authority. Joshua reminded them that if they were as faithful to God as Joseph had been, things would only get better.

INTO THE STORY

"After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, summoned all Israel . . . and said to them: ‘I am old and well advanced in years. You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you. Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. The Lord your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

"Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.

"The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. . . . So be very careful to love the Lord your God. . . .

"Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you.’"

"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.’"

(Joshua 23; 24:14, 15, NIV)
OUT OF THE STORY

True or false: God would rather you be a hypocritical Christian than an overt atheist.

God always gives people a choice as to how they’ll respond. Why do people find following God so difficult?

Is it easier or harder to follow God now than it was in Joshua’s time—in today’s big business, media-saturated, technologically advanced world with a longer Bible to read and Christianity pretty well-respected in society? Was it easier or harder in Joshua’s day, with living memories of amazing miracles, a specific covenant of blessing and curses to follow, and a clearer contrast between pagan depravity and true devotion?

As you look over your life, has God been faithful to you? Have you been faithful to God? How might the two be related?

Joshua urged the Israelites to be careful of intermingling with the Canaanites. Jesus charged Christians to spread out and make disciples of all nations. What’s different about Jesus’ mission for us? What part of Joshua’s advice should we take to heart?

Underline the three phrases, promises, or commands that speak the most urgently to you from the Into the Story passage.

other eyes

“Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing yet had been done.”
—C. S. Lewis, 19th-century British scholar and novelist.

“Faith, as Paul saw it, was a living, flaming thing leading to surrender and obedience to the commandments of Christ.”

punch lines

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17, NIV).

“Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways, for the Lord detests a perverse man but takes the upright into his confidence. The Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble” (Proverbs 3:31-34, NIV).

“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26, NIV).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:35-37).
Sabbath
This week’s What Do You Think? explores the meaning of courage. Joshua equates courage with moral strength of character. Read Joshua 23:6-8. How does living a Christ-centered life require courage? What modern idols does the world face today, and how can Christians courageously take a stand against them?

Sunday
Read this week’s Into the Story and Out of the Story. The questions explore issues of our relationship with God, God’s faithfulness to us, and our relationship and witness to others.

People often get tripped up by two different and equally false ideas about God—that God will excuse their sin without their repentance, and that we can somehow achieve salvation through our own efforts. God calls us to rely completely on Him. Ellen White wrote: “While they trusted in their own strength and righteousness, it was impossible for them to secure the pardon of their sins; they could not meet the claims of God’s perfect law, and it was in vain that they pledged themselves to serve God. It was only by faith in Christ that they could secure pardon of sin, and receive strength to obey God’s law. They must cease to rely upon their own efforts for salvation, they must trust wholly in the merits of the promised Savior, if they would be accepted of God” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 524).

That’s grace. Why do you think some people have such a hard time accepting grace, whether it means letting go of sin or their own misguided efforts to be “good enough”?

Monday
Read this week’s Key Text, Joshua 24:15.

If you grew up attending church, you’ve probably heard it any number of times—a call to serve God wholeheartedly. The text reminds us as well that God always gives us a choice. Joshua painted a word picture of the Israelites’ experience so that everyone would have a clear understanding of the situation, without excuse, but the choice remained.

When the Israelites vowed to follow God, Joshua charged them to get rid of their idols. What changes could you, your family, and church make to follow God more fully?

Tuesday
This week’s Flashlight quote tells about the Amorites coming under judgment for their sins of selfishness and their possessions, their “blessings,” being given to others. Read Proverbs 13:22, Proverbs 28:8, and Ecclesiastes 2:26.

What do these verses tell us about our priorities in life? How can we avoid the Canaanites’ fate?

Wednesday
The world has a way of getting us down—either through tempting us with quick fixes and shortcuts to happiness, or by shouting that God can’t be trusted and we might as well give up. This week’s Punch Lines remind us that we can trust God to help us handle all life’s obstacles. Read them and consider the following questions:

How can we balance our rejection of what the world stands for with showing grace and acceptance to those still caught in its web?

How has God led in your life and in your family’s history? Has He been faithful? What does it mean for God to be faithful?

Thursday
Old habits die hard. Despite all they’d seen of God’s love and power, people in Joshua’s time were still worshipping other gods on the side.

Joshua created a new landmark in Shechem to remind people of their commitment to God. What landmarks of faith can you look back on and/or create to remind you of God’s power and promises? Write a song, draw a picture, or build something that will, like the stone Joshua placed at Shechem, remind you of how God has led in your life.

Friday
Joshua left behind a legacy of faithfulness and commitment that inspired people to follow God for themselves. Who do you look up to as a truly inspiring “godly person”? What sets them apart and makes their example so inspiring? How have they impacted you and your choices?


this week’s reading*
Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 49.

* A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
I. SYNOPSIS

This lesson is based on three short chapters in Patriarchs and Prophets. Each chapter offers students a helpful perspective on the overall theme of stewardship.

The first chapter in this lesson, “Tithes and Offerings,” highlights the importance of giving to the work of God. With our gifts to God we acknowledge that we are managers of God’s resources. As Ellen White points out, “The system of tithes and offerings was intended to impress the minds of men with a great truth—that God is the source of every blessing to His creatures, and that to Him man’s gratitude is due for the good gifts of His providence” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 525). In teaching on this topic, the emphasis should be on giving as a response to what God has given to us in His Son; moreover, all of our resources belong to Him, anyway.

The second chapter, “God’s Care for the Poor,” offers a compelling picture of compassion. Here we see the Father’s heart: “[God] intends that those who have worldly possessions shall regard themselves merely as stewards of His goods, as entrusted with means to be employed for the benefit of the suffering and the needy.

“Christ has said that we shall have the poor always with us, and He unites His interest with that of His suffering people. The heart of our Redeemer sympathizes with the poorest and lowliest of His earthly children” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 535).

The final chapter, “The Annual Feasts,” offers symbols through which we can grasp and teach concepts such as sin, grace, and salvation. As Samuele Bacchiocchi points out, “Even a casual reading of the Bible reveals that God has communicated His saving knowledge not only through abstract reasoning, but also through symbolic representations. The reason is that the human mind grasps symbolic representations more readily than it does abstract reasoning.”

II. TARGET

The students will:
- Learn the value of being a responsible steward of God’s resources. (Know)
- Sense the calling of God to share their resources with the poor. (Feel)
- Give in response to what God has given us. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- Stewardship
- Festivals (biblical)
- Gambling
- Giving

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson and ask them to take a side as you
read the agree/disagree questions. Facilitate a discussion after each question, asking each side to share the reasons for the stand they took.

An alternative activity is to give each student an envelope containing 12 slips of paper. Each slip should have one of the following phrases written on it: be supportive of world missions; spend quality time with family; make a substantial amount of money; be more concerned about the poor and homeless than personal savings; be faithful in paying tithe; move up the corporate ladder; excel in community involvement; be concerned about the environment; be kind to strangers; read the Bible daily; witness to nonbelievers; travel and see the world.

Tell the students these phrases complete the statement: “A successful Christian should . . .” They must read all 12 slips, then arrange the possible answers in the order they feel is most important. Discuss the results.

Illustration

Share the following excerpt written by David Green, editor-at-large of U.S. News & World Report:

“Men and women today are haunted by a sense that in the midst of plenty, our lives seem barren. We are hungry for a greater nourishment of the soul. In the England of today, a businessman turned philosopher, Charles Handy, has won a widespread following with his writing. Capitalism, he argues, delivers the means but not the point of life. Now that we are satisfying our outer needs, we must pay more attention to those within—for beauty, spiritual growth, and human connection. ‘In Africa,’ Handy writes, ‘they say there are two hungers. . . . The lesser hunger is for the things that sustain life, the goods and services, and the money to pay for them, which we all need. The greater hunger is for an answer to the question “why?,” for some understanding of what life is for. ‘In A.D. 1000, people could never truly satisfy their lesser hunger, but history suggests they were pretty good at fulfilling their greater one. Their lives were richer for it, and so were those that followed. A millennium later, our situation seems just the reverse. Is this really where we want to be? Or can we learn something from those poor folks, after all?’”

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

David Green touches on what Ellen White calls “a striking illustration . . . in the days of the prophet Haggai” of the results of selfishly withholding from God. Our lesser needs are met but at the expense of our greater needs. God warns His people, “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it” (Haggai 1:5, 6, NIV).

Ask the students how the observations by David Green intersect with the observations by God. Then have them make a list of our “lesser needs” and our “greater needs.”

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section together, use the following questions to generate discussion.

Review the primary passages in the Bible (Leviticus 27:30-32; Numbers 18:21-28; Deuteronomy 12:6-17; 14:22-28; 26:1, 12; 2 Chronicles 31:5-12; Malachi 3:8-10, etc.) that teach about tithing. Next, give a church tithe envelope to each student and explain the difference between money designated “church budget,” “conference,” and “tithe.” Many young people think that if they donate to tithe it helps support the ministry of the local church. Although some of the tithe in the Seventh-day Adventist system is returned to the local church in the way of paying the pastor’s salary, tithe does not support the local ministries of the church and church school. All of these expenses are taken from donations marked “church budget.”

Help the young people understand how tithes are used in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Make a game of it and give the students 100 pennies. Ask them to divide the coins up according to how one dollar of tithe is invested in the Adventist Church. Although the percentages may vary, of the 100 percent of the tithes that local churches send to their conference, approximately 76 percent of the tithe remains at the local conference to cover employee salaries and other conference programs; 9 percent is invested in paying benefits for retired workers; 9 percent is sent to the union and division offices; and 6 percent is appropriated by the General Conference to worldwide organizations. For further details, refer to a tithe envelope in your church.

Although tithing is the main focus of this lesson,
there are several other directions you may opt to go. For example, you might focus on the festivals by dividing your class into three groups. Have them study the following feasts and then report to the rest of the class what the feast was about and why the Israelites celebrated it. Group 1: The Passover or the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:39; Deuteronomy 16:3; Leviticus 23:6-8); Group 2: Pentecost or the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:14-16); Group 3: The Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths (Deuteronomy 16:13-16; Leviticus 23:34); and the Feast of Ingathering (see Exodus 23:16; 34:22).

Another direction you could take this lesson is to focus on gambling. Find a story of a recovering gambling addict and share it with the class. Allow plenty of time for students to reflect and respond to the story.

A final area you may wish to emphasize in this lesson is that of giving. Involve the students in an interactive exercise that highlights the joy we receive from giving.

Sharing Context and Background

As you lead the students through this lesson, you may find it helpful to share some of the following insights:

1. There are more than 2,300 references to money and possessions in the Bible. By contrast, there are 500 references in the Bible to prayer. Almost one fourth of everything Jesus taught in His sermon on the mount had something to do with money and possessions. Out of 38 parables that Jesus gave in the Gospels, 16 deal with how we handle our money. Jesus said more about money and possessions than about heaven and hell combined. One out of every 10 verses (288 verses!) in the Gospels deals with money or possessions. Without question, the way we manage all with which He entrusts us is a big deal to God.

   Have the students reenact some of the stories that Jesus told about money. Some stories you may wish to use include: the parable of the rich fool, Luke 12:13-21; the story of the rich young ruler, Mark 10:17-31; the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14-30; etc. Allow time for discussion following the dramas.

2. Michael Morrison explains: “The Old Testament shows us that the most common theme for the annual festivals is the Exodus. That was the defining event in the nation’s history, the time when the Israelites became one nation under God. But if an ancient Israelite looked at all the annual festivals, as well as the rules about washings, offerings and various other rituals, it would be difficult to see a unified theme.”

   Ask the students to identify the Exodus theme in the following feasts: the Passover, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

3. Foxnews.com reports:

   Research by the International Centre for Youth Gambling concludes that gambling’s “popularity is on the rise amongst both children and adolescents . . . in both legal and illegal forms.” The Centre says that “an alarmingly high per-

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
 questions worldwide have been found to engage in gambling activities.\textsuperscript{3} About 80 percent of high school students admit they gambled for money in the past year. Several studies estimate 4 to 8 percent of adolescents have a “serious” gambling problem.\textsuperscript{4}

Questions to facilitate discussion:

- Why do you think many teenagers have an addiction to gambling?
- How would you explain the increase in popularity of online gambling?
- What is the best way to help a friend who is addicted to gambling?
- What does the Bible teach about gambling?
- Write your own proverbs that speak to the foolishness of gambling; then share your proverbs with the rest of the class.

### III. CLOSING

**Activity**

For a closing activity, divide the students into small groups and ask each group to create a commercial to advertise the primary point (as they see it) of the study. Have each group share their commercial with the larger group. Naturally, the groups will have different emphases from the study.

**Summary**

As mentioned above, this lesson can be taken in a number of different directions. Whether you emphasize stewardship, the feasts, tithing, caring for the poor, giving, or gambling, the overarching theme of this lesson brings us back to a question of lordship. The most important point in this study is to challenge students to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives.

This lordship then governs the way we spend money. For example, if God is Lord of the wallet then our finances will be used in ways to honor our Lord. This includes paying a faithful tithe, helping the poor, carefully guarding against frivolous abuses such as gambling, and so on.

In a similar vein, the festivals were established so that the people of God would be reminded regularly of God’s lordship in their lives. These feasts were practiced so that God’s chosen people would be reminded of God’s faithfulness in the past. Remembering God’s provision in the past sparks faith to continue to submit to His lordship in the future.

Whatever aspects of the lesson you choose to emphasize, remember the comprehensive theme of lordship. If Christ is Lord (and He is), then He must be Lord of everything.

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\textsuperscript{2} U.S. News & World Report, August 16/August 23, 1999.

\textsuperscript{3} As quoted at www.wcg.org/lit/law/festivals/festivalspic.htm.

\textsuperscript{4} As quoted at www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,135613,00.html.

\textsuperscript{5} As quoted at honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDev/Com/guidebk/teachtip/effquest.htm.

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Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 50, 51, 52.

* A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about Beginning of the End at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
"God has made men His stewards. The property which He has placed in their hands is the means that He has provided for the spread of the gospel. To those who prove themselves faithful stewards He will commit greater trusts. Saith the Lord, ‘Them that honor Me I will honor.’ 1 Samuel 2:30" (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 529).

"Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always."

(Deuteronomy 14:22, 23, NIV)

"After she had given him a drink, she said, ‘I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking’" (Genesis 24:19, NIV).
what do you think?

Assuming you had a bottomless bank account, make a list of what you would buy.

Read the following statements. Circle the ones you agree with and cross out the ones with which you disagree.

- It is a sin to have more money than you need when others are starving.
- Wealth is a gift from God.
- People have a right to do whatever they want with their money.
- Everything we have belongs to God.
- Not paying a faithful tithe is a sin against God.
- Money is the root of all evil.

did you know?

There are two distinct tithes that are spoken of in Scripture. The first tithe was to be used exclusively to support the work of the priests and Levites. In Numbers 18:21, 26, God offers this instruction regarding the first tithe: “I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting. . . . Speak to the Levites and say to them: ‘When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord’s offering’” (NIV).

The second tithe was to be consumed at the tabernacle as a holy feast before the Lord. This is the tithe that is referred to in texts such as Deuteronomy 14:28 and 26:12-15.

INTO THE STORY

“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. If a man redeems any of his tithe, he must add a fifth of the value to it. The entire tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd’s rod—will be holy to the Lord. He must not pick out the good from the bad or make any substitution. If he does make a substitution, both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed’”

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘These people say, “The time has not yet come for the Lord’s house to be built.”’”

“Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ‘Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?’

“Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.’

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,’ says the Lord. ‘You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands.’”

(Leviticus 27:30-33; Haggai 1:2-11, NIV)
punch lines

“Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that your house and your father’s house would minister before me forever.’ But now the Lord declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained’” (1 Samuel 2:30, NIV).

“I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:9, 10, NIV).

“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, “How do we rob you?” In tithes and offerings” (Malachi 3:8, NIV).

“And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:25, NIV).

“But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be asked; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48, NIV).

“The world asks, ‘What does a man own?’; Christ asks, ‘How does he use it?’”
—Andrew Murray, 19th-20th-century South African minister.

“God entrusts us with money as a test; for like a toy to the child, it is training for handling things of more value.”
—Fred Smith, Leadership, vol. 4, no. 1.

“He who bestows his goods upon the poor shall have as much again and ten times more.” —John Bunyan, 17th-century English preacher and author.
Sabbath
Complete the What Do You Think? section. Reflect on the things you would buy if you had unlimited money. What does your list say about your deepest values?

Find a friend and discuss the statements in the agree/disagree section. Do you and your friend share the same opinions? If so, why? If not, why not?

What do you think is the greatest barrier to being faithful in returning tithes and offerings? How might God help you to overcome this barrier?

Sunday
Read the passage from Haggai in Into the Story and answer the following questions:

What phrase does God repeat? What does this tell you about the importance of the message? Can you relate to the description that God gives when He says, “You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it”?

Ever feel as if you’re running faster and eating more and working harder and yet you are plagued by exhaustion and fatigue? Do you party harder but feel empty on the inside? What does the experience of God’s people in the days of Haggai tell you about living a purposeful, fulfilling life today?

Monday
Rewrite the Punch Lines into a modern paraphrase.

Tuesday
Interview someone who has faithfully paid tithes and offerings for many years. Ask the giver if they’ve felt that it was a worthwhile investment. See if the person has ever had any regrets about giving. Is there a better way to experience the faithfulness of God than through giving? How does giving benefit the giver? Who benefits more, the one who gives or the one who receives?

Wednesday
Read the following songs that Ellen White quotes in describing the Israelites as they made their way to Jerusalem for the Passover feast: Song of Solomon 2:11-13; Psalm 48:1, 2; 121:1, 2; 122:1-6; 125:1, 2. Imagine the scene of joyful people celebrating on their way to the annual festival. Try to smell the scents, hear the music, and see the dancing.

Thursday
Reflect on the following thought from Patriarchs and Prophets, page 529: “The plan of Moses to raise means for the building of the tabernacle was highly successful. No urging was necessary. Nor did he employ any of the devices to which churches in our day so often resort. He made no grand feast. He did not invite the people to scenes of gaiety, dancing, and general amusement; neither did he institute lotteries, nor anything of this profane order, to obtain means to erect the tabernacle for God. The Lord directed Moses to invite the children of Israel to bring their offerings. He was to accept gifts from everyone that gave willingly, from his heart. And the offerings came in so great abundance that Moses bade the people cease bringing, for they had supplied more than could be used.”

Have you ever seen gimmicky fund-raising done in the church? Why do you suppose Ellen White discouraged this approach when financing God’s work? Does God want funds that come from a begrudging heart? Why or why not?

Friday
After reading chapter 51, “God’s Care for the Poor,” in Patriarchs and Prophets, consider the poem “I Am Still Hungry.”

I was hungry and you formed a humanities club and discussed my hunger. I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release. I was naked and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance. I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your health. I was homeless and you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God. I was lonely and you left me alone to pray for me. You seem so close to God; but I am still very hungry, and lonely, and cold.

—Anonymous

Now pray about what God is asking you to do to care for the marginalized of our world. Perhaps you can send a note of encouragement to a friend who is struggling. Maybe you can visit someone in the hospital. Or you can call a church member who has recently had a death in the family. Whatever God’s asking you to do, do it!

(Remember you can use the Notes pages in the back of your study guide to write your answers to the questions.)

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This lesson is primarily about Gideon, but it has volumes to teach us about numerous topics. The dangers of compromising with the world, worshipping idols, following the calling of God, character, leadership, selling out to God, knowing the will of God—these are but a few of the directions this story can take us. For the purposes of this lesson, the emphasis will be on three things: (1) the will of God; (2) knowing your purpose; and (3) the remnant and its mission.

While some Christians cite Gideon’s method of setting out a fleece (Judges 6:36-40) as the best way to discern God’s will, it’s important to note that this is the only occasion in Scripture when God revealed His will through a fleece. The fleece was not God’s first choice in methods. After all, the Lord had already told Gideon what to do (Judges 6:11-16) and even gave him a confirming sign (Judges 6:17-22). Still, Gideon displayed less than perfect faith and demanded more evidence. So is there a better way than the fleece method to know God’s will? Max Lucado answers: “Yes, God has clearly and objectively told us what He wants throughout the Bible. For example, the Ten Commandments give straightforward instructions to guide our behavior in numerous areas of life.”

Another nuance of Gideon’s story centers on God’s calling in life. In Ellen White’s treatment of the story, it is clear that God called Gideon to do a special work for His people. Still today, God calls young people to a purpose-filled life.

Finally, just as God delivered His people from the Midianites, so too will He deliver His people at the end of time. Satan, and his agents in this world, will not have the last word. Praise God that He has, throughout the ages, preserved a remnant people.

II. TARGET

The students will:
- Discern the will of God. (Know)
- See that God has a purpose for their life. (Feel)
- Follow God’s promptings. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- The will of God
- Purpose (knowing yours)
- The remnant and its mission

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Divide the students into groups and refer them to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. Have them identify other areas of life where young people struggle to know God’s will. Give each group two minutes to brainstorm as long a list as possible. The answers must reflect their own experience in wondering about God’s will but cannot duplicate the questions listed in What Do You Think?

An alternative activity is to ask church members to
answer (in one sentence) the question: “How do you know God’s will?” Put their answers on one side of a bulletin board and then their picture labeled with their name and profession on the other side of the board. Have the students try to match the answer with the person that gave it. Next, take each answer individually and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of it.

Illustration
To introduce the lesson, read the following story. Introduce it by saying something like, “When it comes to knowing God’s will, Pastor Karl Haffner tells this story”: “What are we going to do?” I moaned to my wife, Cherié. “Maybe we should move.”

“But do you want to raise our kids in Mickey Mouse’s backyard?” Cherié asked.

Late into the night we anguished. Clearly, there was no easy answer. We had to decide—continue to pastor in Washington State or move across the country to Florida. The more we prayed about it, the clearer it became . . . that God was not going to spell out His will in my alphabet soup (but don’t think that I didn’t ask Him to). This decision was like seeing through a jug of milk.

While in the valley of decision, the pastors on our church staff threw a “you-better-not-move” party. Part of the festivities included an exercise in which I was instructed to draw an M&M from a jumbo-sized bag. “This is a fleece deal,” one pastor explained. “If the candy you select is red, then it’s God’s will for you to stay. If it’s any other color, you are to move to Florida.”

“OK,” I played along.

I used scissors to cut into the new bag of M&Ms—careful not to peak inside. With eyes closed I reached into the bag and pulled out an M&M. It was as red as the sox in Boston. So I tried again. Another red M&M. A fluke? I tried again. Red. And again. Red. Red. Red. Dumping the bag into a bowl I found nothing but red M&Ms with the exception of one lonely green candy at the bottom of the bag. (The green M&M was to “prove” that the process was not fixed.)

While I’m still not sure how they rigged it, I never took their shenanigans as “a sign.” I was quite convinced that a real fleece would not contain so many unhealthy carbs.

Out of the Story for Teachers
After you read Into the Story with your students, dig deeper into the text by exploring the following questions.

Ellen White offers a broader context for the story of Gideon by citing Judges 1:28: “When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely” (NIV). She explains: “It only remained for them, trusting in the assurance of divine aid, to complete the work of dispossessing the inhabitants of the land. But this they failed to do. By entering into league with the Canaanites they directly transgressed the command of God, and thus failed to fulfill the condition on which He had promised to place them in possession of Canaan” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 543).

Often people puzzle over God’s will. Could it be, however, that we make this subject far more complicated than it needs to be? Gideon never would have needed to put out a fleece had God’s people not “directly transgressed the command of God.” Discuss this principle: When it comes to knowing God’s will, don’t let what you don’t know keep you from doing what you do know.

In what ways might compromising what we know to be God’s command weaken our ability to know God’s will in areas where His will may not be so clear? For example, you may not know what college God wants you to attend, but you can be certain that if you attend college God does want you to live with integrity and not cheat to get a good grade. For most of us, the challenge is not in knowing the small part of God’s will that is unknown; rather, the challenge is to live up to what is clearly revealed in the Bible.

Other questions to discuss:

• What is the connection between knowing God’s will and following one’s calling? Does following God’s will guarantee a purpose-driven life? Explain your answer.

• In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed,
“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39, NIV). What does Jesus’ example teach us when seeking God’s will?

• Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. How does the story of Gideon illustrate the principle of this passage?

Sharing Context and Background
For this lesson it might be helpful to offer students:

1. A historical perspective
Judges 6:1, 2 says: “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds” (NIV).

In your own words, share this brief history of the Midianites:
The Bible tells us that Midian was a son of Abraham and his concubine Keturah (have a volunteer read Genesis 25:1-6). His descendants, the Midianites, settled in the territory east of the Jordan River and also in the area east of the Dead Sea (later occupied by Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites), and southward through the desert wilderness of the Arabah (have students find the territory on a map of ancient Israel). Midian was also where Moses spent 40 years between the time that he fled Egypt and his return to deliver the Jewish slaves. During that time, Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian. The Bible implies that God’s appearance in the burning bush at Horeb occurred in Midian (have a volunteer read Exodus 3:1). In later years the Midianites were often oppressive and hostile to the Israelites, at least partly as God’s punishment for their idolatry. At the time of Gideon, the Midianites were raiding Israel with the use of swift camels. Thus, the deliverance from the Midianites was a great miracle celebrated by God’s people. Today, the former territory of Midian is found through small portions of western Saudi Arabia, southern Jordan, southern Israel and the Sinai (have students find this area on a modern map).

2. A personal perspective
Share your own story of God calling you. Describe doors that God opened and closed. Did you use any kind of fleece or sign from God? How did you know it was God’s will? This can be a story of a major decision (e.g., getting married, choosing a major, joining the church, etc.) or it can be a more mundane experience of sensing God’s call (e.g., helping a homeless man, volunteering to teach the lesson, initiating a conversation that seemed to be a divine encounter, etc.).

3. A spiritual perspective
The chapter in Patriarchs and Prophets ends with these sobering words: “Satan works through the ungodly, under cover of a pre-
tended friendship, to allure God's people into sin, that he may separate them from Him; and when their defense is removed, then he will lead his agents to turn against them and seek to accomplish their destruction” (p. 559). Who are “the Midianites” of today? What influences in our culture allure God's people into sin? What can we learn from this chapter of compromise in the history of the Israelites?

III. CLOSING

Activity
For a closing activity, have students affirm God's calling in one another's lives. For instance, they may start with a girl of whom it may be said, “Courtney, we think you have an uncanny ability to tell friends the hard truth in a loving way. You can kick someone in the seat, and the person feels hugged. Perhaps God is calling you to be a counselor or a principal at school.” Have the students offer suggestions for everyone in the class.

Summary
1. The story of Gideon offers an ideal context in which to talk about knowing and following God's will. Just as God called Gideon and had a purpose for his life, so God has called every young person today. 2. Don't be afraid to challenge the young people with this lesson. They want to be pressed to do great things for God. They should be reminded that God has called them to soar like eagles, not grovel like pigs. 3. Moreover, this lesson illustrates the disastrous results of getting too enamored with the world. Just as God called the Jews of old to be uncompromising in their stand against the heathen nations, God is looking for a remnant of people today who will dare to stand against Satan's stronghold in this world. 4. And through Bible study, prayer, the Holy Spirit's leading, and the guidance of godly people, they can understand more clearly God's will and purpose for their lives. They need someone to call sin by its right name and give clear warning to the consequences of compromise. Just as the angel reminded Gideon, do not fear; God is with you!


Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 53.

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Knowing God’s Will

“Like Israel, Christians too often yield to the influence of the world and conform to its principles and customs, in order to secure the friendship of the ungodly; but in the end it will be found that these professed friends are the most dangerous of foes. The Bible plainly teaches that there can be no harmony between the people of God and the world” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 559).

Flashlight

“No sooner had Gideon died than... they set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the Lord their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side. They also failed to show kindness to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) for all the good things he had done for them.”

(Judges 8:33-35, NIV)
Rank the following in order (“1” being the most difficult and “10” being the least difficult) when it comes to knowing God’s will with regard to:

___ Whom to marry?
___ What career to pursue?
___ What to do this weekend?
___ Where to work this summer?
___ Whom to ask out for a date?
___ Whom to hang out with at school?
___ Whether or not to experiment with drugs?
___ What book to read for pleasure?
___ What to say on www.myspace.com?
___ Whether or not to trust in Jesus?
___ Whether or not to get involved in a local church?

Questions to consider:

• What’s the most difficult decision I have ever made?
• What made it so difficult?

**into the story**

“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.”

“The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, ‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.’”

“The Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?’

“But Lord,” Gideon asked, ‘how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’

“The Lord answered, ‘I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.’

“Gideon replied, ‘If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.’”

“The Lord said to Gideon, ‘With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place.’”

“When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites. Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, ‘Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah.’”

(Judges 6:1, 2, 11, 12, 14-17; 7:7, 22-24, NIV)
punch lines

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isaiah 30:21, NIV).

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5, 6, NIV).

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1, 2, NIV).

“The righteousness of the blameless makes a straight way for them, but the wicked are brought down by their own wickedness” (Proverbs 11:5, NIV).

“Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13, NIV).

other eyes

“The will of God is not a mysterious set of sealed orders we search for and receive if we happen to hit on the right formula. Rather, the will of God is a relationship with Him in which He discloses His purpose, power and plan for our lives.”—Lloyd Ogilvie, retired pastor and chaplain to the U.S. senate.

“The tragedy of modern man is not that he knows less and less about the meaning of his own life, but that it bothers him less and less.”—Vaclav Havel, current writer and dramatist, president of Czechoslovakia (1989-1992) and later of the Czech Republic (1993-2003).

OUT OF THE STORY

What details of the story of Gideon might you remember that are not included in the selected verses above?

What words or phrases capture the various emotions of this story most?

In your opinion, what is the most important lesson of the story of Gideon?

If you were to capture this story in a five-word title, what would it be?

What does this story teach us about knowing the will of God?

What does this story teach us about knowing one’s purpose in life?

What does this story teach us about the mission of God’s remnant people?
Sabbath

Finding God’s will is a hot topic among teenagers. After all, many young people are facing important decisions and genuinely want to know and follow God’s will. But is Gideon’s method of testing God with a fleece the best way to discover God’s will? Google the phrase “How to know God’s will” and see if you can discover some helpful guidance for understanding God’s will in your life.

Sunday

Read excerpts from the story of Gideon in the Into the Story section of this week’s lesson and work through the study questions listed in Out of the Story. Next, read the entire story in Judges 6–8 and list all the positive character qualities that you see in Gideon.

Monday

Review the Key Text for this lesson. How might you explain the fickleness of the Israelites in their relationship to God? What role does the spiritual leader play in safeguarding God’s people from backsliding? What are the idols that we are tempted to worship today? Have you ever failed to “remember the Lord” even when God has rescued you “from the hands of all [your] enemies”?

Also reflect on the phrase “They also failed to show kindness to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) for all the good things he had done for them.” Do you ever fail to show gratitude toward people who have done good things for you? How can you be more intentional about expressing thankfulness to the people who have had a spiritual impact in your life?

Tuesday

The quote in the Flashlight section applies the mistakes that the Israelites made to our lives today. Pray about how the world influences you. Ask a mature Christian about strategies to keep from conforming to the principles and customs of the world. Identify ways in which the world sneaks into us (e.g., billboards, television, friends, etc.). Do you have any “ungodly” friends that are influencing you away from Christ? Memorize the statement, “The Bible plainly teaches that there can be no harmony between the people of God and the world” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 559).

Wednesday

Marinate your mind in the Punch Lines for this week. Contained in these verses you will find profound principles for enjoying life with God. Read the texts over and over until you have them deeply entrenched in your mind. Now use this biblical foundation to create a game plan for leveraging your life for God. Identify three principles that you can use to guide you in understanding God’s will for your life.

Now, apply them to your life and see what happens!

Thursday

The story of Gideon illustrates that God would prefer a few sold-out soldiers than a mighty army of spiritual pansies. Which group do you think you would be in? What does selling out to God look like in your life?

Friday

Reflect on this commentary by Ellen White: “The leader whom God chose to overthrow the Midianites occupied no prominent position in Israel. He was not a ruler, a priest, or a Levite. He thought himself the least in his father’s house. But God saw in him a man of courage and integrity. He was distrustful of himself and willing to follow the guidance of the Lord. God does not always choose for His work men of the greatest talents, but He selects those whom He can best use” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 553).

If you were completely “willing to follow the guidance of the Lord,” where do you suppose He might take you? What is God’s grandest dream for your life? What is keeping you from fulfilling that dream?


this week’s reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 53.

* A special adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.