

ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

APR MAY JUNE 2001

Bible Biographies

Actors in the Drama Called *Planet Earth*



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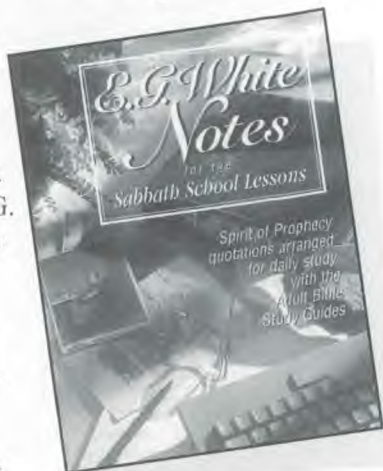
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Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide (ISSN 1096-7400) (Standard Edition). Published quarterly by Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A. One-year subscription in U.S.A., \$8.79; single copy, \$3.99. One-year subscription to countries outside U.S.A., \$11.79; single \$3.99. All prices at U.S.A. exchange. Periodicals postage paid at Nampa, Idaho. When a change of address is desired, please send both old and new addresses.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide (Standard Edition), P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353. Printed in the United States of America.

Editions in Braille available. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.

Easy Reading Edition available. Contact Pacific Press®, 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687

Copyright © 2001 by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600, USA.

Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide (ISSN 1096-7400)/No. 424/April-June 2001.

Contents

1. Christ and Satan: Contenders for Control (March 31–April 6) ..	6
2. The Betrayers—Peter and Judas (April 7-13).....	14
3. Grace Under Pressure—Noah and Job (April 14-20)	22
4. Wives as Advisers (April 21-27)	30
5. Joseph: From Pit to Palace (April 28–May 4)	38
6. Sibling Rivalry (May 5-11)	46
7. Children Showcased (May 12-18)	56
8. The Personal Factor (May 19-25).....	64
9. Powerful Prayers (May 26–June 1)	72
10. Martyrs and Their Murderers (June 2-8)	80
11. Giants of Faith (June 9-15)	88
12. Women in Scripture (June 16-22).....	96
13. Tiny Sins, Huge Results (June 23-29)	104

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The Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).

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EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

“A Chemical Scum”

After the construction of a building at a famous university, some professors wanted these words, from an ancient Greek philosopher, placed on the main wall: “Man is the measure of all things.” The president of the prestigious institution, however, had other notions, and the sentence that went up instead was: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?”

This story is a minor mirror of two contending world views. One makes humanity the creator and subject of truth, the other places God in that role. No middle ground exists between these two positions, no possibility of compromise, no potential for synthesis. It's either one or the other.

As Adventists, there's no doubt which view we take. God is Creator of truth, the Source of truth, and the Giver of truth. As humans, we don't originate truth; we merely receive it as a gift . . . and the greatest gift of truth, ever, was in the person of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer—the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28), the One “in whom we have redemption through his blood” (Eph. 1:7).

If the Bible is the story of redemption, then it is also the story of those who are redeemed, those who are on the receiving end of truth. The Bible, therefore, doesn't center on God in a vacuum; it centers, instead, on Him in His divine interaction with humankind, on those redeemed at such an infinite cost to Himself. British astrophysicist Stephen Hawking once said that humankind was nothing but “a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet, orbiting round a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies.” He couldn't be more wrong. Christ didn't die for “a chemical scum.” He died to save beings created in His own image, beings so precious that they were bought with His own blood (1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

Thus, however much the gospel is the work of God alone, it's always the work of God *for humankind*. The gospel wouldn't be the gospel were it not “good news” for human beings. To learn about the gospel is to learn not only about God's unfailing love but about His unfailing love for His failing and unloving creatures.

This quarter's Bible Study Guide, *Bible Biographies*, deals with numerous people on the receiving end of this unfailing love, even those who failed in loving back. Special thanks to our principal contributor, Dr. Wilma McClarty, of Southern Adventist University, who carefully and thoughtfully looked at the question put on the college wall: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?”

The answer, thanks to God's gift of His Son, is “good news” indeed.

Clifford Goldstein

Bible Biographies: Actors in the Drama Called *Planet Earth*

The Bible is the Word of God, the inspired account of the Lord's rescue of fallen humanity. It's a book about God, humankind, and especially about God's intervention with humankind. From the Genesis narrative of Eden Lost to Revelation's promise of Eden Restored, the plan of redemption unfolds through the lives of people.

Born full-grown into the Garden, Adam and Eve, through sin, lost their perfect environment. Were it not for the promise of salvation, they and their descendants would have existed with no hope of anything beyond the grave, which is no hope at all. Instead, through Christ and the promises fulfilled in Him, these fallen beings have the hope and assurance of eternal life in a world without sin and all its terrible consequences. They are, in a real sense, "children of the promise" found in Jesus and the salvation He has secured for us (Rom. 9:8).

Who are these children, and how have they responded to this promise of salvation? Saints, sinners, slaves, sovereigns, princes, paupers, pagans, even prophets—that's who they are. Lovely or loathsome, major or minor, courageous or cowardly, they and their stories are all included in the Bible.

Through sixty-six books that cover everything from the fall of Lucifer to life on the new earth, the Bible introduces its readers to just a few hundred characters out of possible millions. Some get scant treatment; others are fleshed out in considerable detail. Joseph, for instance, merits twenty-one chapters (Genesis 30 to 50); Job's wife, in contrast, gets only two *verses* (Job 2:9, 10). Yet, lessons exist for us from them all.

Of necessity, the Bible personalities selected for this quarter's study must likewise be a sampling: The characters were chosen because they could (sometimes) be paired with others who under comparable circumstances or in similar relationships made different choices, choices not unlike those that we, living on the same planet, often make.

They, like us, are all part of the drama, the last act even now building toward a spectacular climax. But no need for fearful suspense—the Bible tells how the play will end. However, and most importantly, individual destinies, including our own, await the final resolution.

Because the last curtain has not yet gone down, because we still act out our unscripted roles in the play ourselves, because we still can choose Christ or Satan, these lessons invite us all (1) to review the lives of the selected Bible personalities, (2) to analyze the reasons for their successes and failures, (3) to assess our role in the great controversy, and then (4) to apply what we learn to strengthen our own relationship with Jesus, who through His life and death has given us redemption.

"Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11, RSV).

Though our lives are not recorded in Scripture, we are all characters in the same drama as those whose lives are revealed in the Book. Let us learn from both their triumphs and their failures. Because, in many ways, their stories are ours as well.



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Christ and Satan: Contenders for Control



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 1:1, 2; Ezek. 28:12-15; Isa. 9:6; Rev. 12:9.

MEMORY TEXT: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The two forces contending for control of planet Earth had both existed in heaven's perfect environment. Yet Satan's jealousy over Christ's authority started a controversy that would involve every member of the human race. Bible biographies are, in essence, a holy record of the choices people made in this conflict and of how God honored those choices, either for or against Him.

THE TWO FORCES DO BATTLE. Sin began in heaven, in Lucifer, whose pride and vanity pushed him into rebelling against the authority and government of God. Beautiful, brilliant, highly regarded in the heavenly courts, Lucifer nevertheless was not satisfied with all that he had been given. He coveted what he could never have: the authority of Christ Himself. And here, in heaven, with Lucifer, is the place where all the trouble began.

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! . . . You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; . . . I will make myself like the Most High” ’ ’ (Isa. 14:12-14, RSV).

Though this controversy started in heaven, it moved to the earth, bringing a new set of characters (the human race) into the conflict—even if, in the end, the basic issue is the same: Who will rule, Christ or Satan?

WHEN PERFECTION FAILED (Ezek. 28:12-15).

“Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee” (Ezek. 28:14, 15).

The Bible says that Lucifer (depicted in this context under the image of the king of Tyre) was created perfect. *And yet iniquity was found in him?* How could a perfect being have iniquity, especially one living in a perfect environment like heaven?

The answer, of course, must be that “perfection” included the potential for imperfection. Whatever Scripture meant when it said that Lucifer was “perfect” in his ways, it didn’t mean that the potential for evil wasn’t there. The potential must have been there because evil eventually arose, even in a perfect creature living in a perfect environment. Whatever being “perfect” meant, it obviously didn’t exclude the possibility of doing wrong.

How could sin arise in a perfect environment like the one that existed in heaven?

No one knows. In fact, to explain sin is, in a sense, to excuse it. However, one point is clear: God is a God of love (see 1 John 4:8, 16), and for love to *be* love, it can never be forced. In other words, even God cannot force love; for the moment it is forced, it is no longer love. In the same way that a triangle, in order to be a triangle, must have three sides—love, to be love, by its very definition as love, must be free. And if love is the foundation of the environment of heaven, then it’s clear that the potential for not loving, for not obeying, had to exist. Thus, God created Lucifer free, and Lucifer, using that freedom, made wrong choices.

Likewise, we have the same free choices as well.

God didn’t force obedience in heaven. He doesn’t force it here on earth as well. While in the flesh, Jesus never forced anyone to follow Him.

What implications does that freedom have for us today? How can we use it for good or for evil?

In what ways do we manifest that freedom every day of our lives? What are some of the potential dangers inherent in freedom?

FATHER OF TRUTH, FATHER OF LIES (John 8:44; John 14:6).

Originally united in purpose, Christ and Satan forever diverged when Lucifer rebelled. Christ remained the eternal way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and Satan became the “father of lies” (John 8:44, RSV). In fact, one of the earliest scriptural accounts of Satan establishes him as a liar: “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die’ ” (Gen. 3:4, RSV). These words were spoken in blatant contradiction to the words of the Lord, who specifically warned that if Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he would “surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Early on in the Bible, then, the contrast between truth and lies is established.

The father of lies has passed his perverted skill along to his followers, even tempting prophets to lie: “ ‘I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ ” ” (Jer. 23:25, NKJV).

Lying is deemed so bad by God that its prohibition is placed in the Ten Commandments, right along with warnings against adultery and murder (Exod. 20:16). In other words, God cares about not just what we do but what we say as well.

Give some examples from the Bible of the devastation that believing and/or telling lies have wrought. Give some examples from modern life about the effects of lies. Isn't it easy to see just how damaging this sin can be? Why do you think that even in non-Christian societies lying is deemed an evil? How could any society or social unit exist if lying were not deemed an evil to be avoided?

What do these texts say about truth?

Ps. 117:2 _____

Ps. 119:142 _____

Prov. 16:6 _____

John 17:19 _____

2 Thess. 2:12 _____

What did Jesus mean when He said, “ ‘and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free’ ”? (John 8:32, RSV). In what way does truth make us free? Share some practical examples from your own life on what this text means.

THE SAVIOR, THE ADVERSARY (1 John 2:1; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:7-13).

From His birth, Jesus was identified as Savior of the world: Mary is told that she “‘will bear a son . . . you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins’ ” (Matt. 1:21, RSV).

In contrast, Revelation 12:7-13 establishes Satan early on as the adversary to Christ and the accuser of humankind.

*The Hebrew verb **stn**, from which the name “Satan” is derived, means “to accuse,” or “to act as an adversary.”*

The clearest example of Satan’s work as the “accuser” appears in Zechariah 3. “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him” (Zech. 3:1, RSV). The verb translated “accuse” in the text comes from the same three-consonant root (*stn*) as “Satan” itself. Thus the name “Satan” means the “accuser.” (For a fabulous commentary on this story, and Christ’s work in our behalf in meeting these accusations, read “Joshua and the Angel,” in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 467-476).

Why is the depiction of Satan as “Your adversary the devil prow [ing] around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour” such an appropriate one? (1 Pet. 5:8, RSV). In what ways does Satan seek to “devour” us?

Even people who don’t necessarily believe in a literal Satan often sense a battle going on between good and evil. Centuries before Christ, the Greek philosopher Empedocles wrote that there were two forces contending in the world, “friendship and strife.” American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes once wrote: “We are all soldiers in a great campaign, the details of which are veiled from us” (Quoted in *Anchor Points* [Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 1993], p. 59). Thus many people, even without the “details,” sense the existence of a conflict between good and evil.

Even those people who sense a struggle between opposing forces often don’t believe in a literal, supernatural struggle between real forces. How do you make real to someone, particularly someone from a secular background, the reality of the battle between Christ and Satan? And though we ourselves believe in the literalness of this struggle, how does our awareness of that reality impact our lives?

DESCRIPTIVE NAMES (Isa. 9:6; Rev. 12:9).

Biographers prefer to write about what they call “round characters,” those with many-sided, complex personalities, rather than “flat characters,” those with limited change or development.

Both Christ and Satan classify as round characters—which is probably why the Bible writers use dozens of different names to describe them.

Fill in the contrasting names:

CHRIST

1. John 10:11 _____ Shepherd _____

2. Luke 7:34 _____

3. 1 Tim. 2:5 _____

SATAN

1. John 10:12 _____ Wolf _____

2. Matt. 13:39 _____

3. Rev. 12:10 _____

What’s in a Name? By definition, all metaphors compare two things basically unlike. Hence, all metaphors fall short of completely explaining anything. How could two different authors label Jesus so differently, one calling Him a Lamb (1 Pet. 1:19) and another calling Him a Lion? (Rev. 5:5). In fact, the same author, John, in Revelation 5:6, calls Jesus a Lamb, then calls Him a Lion in the next verse.

It’s fascinating that Jesus has so many different names. He is the Bread of life, the High Priest, the Second Adam, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Savior, the Rock of Ages, the Lord our Righteousness, Immanuel (God with us), the Bright and Morning Star, our Advocate, the Anointed, the Author of our salvation, the Alpha and Omega, the Passover, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the Faithful Witness, the Good Shepherd. He is the Way, the Word of God, the Truth. He is our Creator, our Wonderful Counselor, the Cornerstone. He is the Redeemer and the Resurrection and the Life. He is the Vine, the Captain of our Salvation, and our Righteousness. He is also a King, a Lamb, and a Lion.

What do all these names tell us about Christ and the work He has done, is doing, and will do? Which names of Christ most appeal to you personally? Because we are all so different and all relate to our Lord differently, could these various names have been given in order to help us each connect to the Lord in ways that best suit our unique personhood? If so, what should that tell us about not trying to force people into spiritual molds, one size for all?

THE KING OF KINGS, THE FALSE GOD OF THIS WORLD
(Matt. 4:8, 9; Rev. 19:16).

At the end of time, what a curtain call! The entire cast will be on stage to witness the climax to the drama called *Planet Earth*. Each actor will have supported one of the two, the false god of this world (Matt. 4:8, 9) or the “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev. 19:16, RSV).

Contrast the two different fates of Christ and Satan at the Second Coming:

Rev. 19:7 _____

Rev. 20:2, 3 _____

If Christ is all-powerful, in what sense is the whole world “in the power of the evil one”? (1 John 5:19, RSV).

“He is called the ‘god of this world’ because it is his purpose to secure complete control of this world and its inhabitants. He is the ‘god of this world’ because the world is largely under his control. He rules in the hearts of most of its inhabitants (cf. Eph. 1:1, 2). The world obeys his dictates, yields to his temptations, takes part in his wicked ways and abominations. He is the author and instigator of all sin, and the very embodiment of it. Willful sinners are said to be given over to Satan (1 Cor. 5:5; cf. 1 Tim. 1:20). He is the ‘god of this world’ because of his control, even though limited, of the forces of nature, the elements of earth, sea, and sky.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 854.

Unconditional Defeat. One thing the Bible makes clear: At the end of the age, sin, Satan, and evil will forever be destroyed. In this war, there will be no compromise, no sort of middle ground, with each side giving a little here and there in order to come to a truce. Instead, there will be a complete and total victory of one contender, Christ, against His enemy, Satan, who will be totally vanquished. It will be the same with their followers: total victory for those with Christ, total defeat for those with Satan.

How should the finality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan influence our lives now, when we are so often faced with situations that seem to demand compromise?

In other words, when all is done, evil will be given no place at all. What does that tell us about giving evil any place now?

FURTHER STUDY: Temptations of Power. For a list of over one hundred forty titles or names of Jesus, read Harold Monser, ed., *Monser's Topical Index and Digest of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1960), pp. 330-332. For additional names for Satan, look up the references under "Satan" in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 1142.

Note: The great controversy started over pride, over the desire for the power for supremacy. Satan may have been the first, but he certainly was not the last to succumb to power's temptations. Like Lucifer, Pilate knew he was wrong but did not resist its intoxicating appeal. "Pilate trembled as he heard that Christ had risen. He could not doubt the testimony given, and from that hour peace left him forever. *For the sake of worldly honor, for fear of losing his authority and his life*, he had delivered Jesus to die. He was now fully convinced that it was not merely an innocent man of whose blood he was guilty, but the Son of God. Miserable to its close was the life of Pilate. Despair and anguish crushed every hopeful, joyful feeling. He refused to be comforted and died a most miserable death."—*Early Writings*, p. 185 (emphasis supplied).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Sunday's lesson discussed the freedom inherent in the notion of love. Did this freedom demand that sin come, or did it demand only an environment that would allow it? Explain your answer. We are told that sin will never arise again. Does this mean that we will not be free to sin again in heaven? Or will it mean that after having seen the devastation that sin has wrought, all those in heaven, though free, would never dare venture on that ground again? Read *Early Writings*, p. 40, where Ellen White talks about beings on another planet who have been forbidden from eating the fruit of a tree. What does that tell us about freedom in a sinless world?
2. Satan wanted to be like God. His problem was one of authority. Though few of us make pretensions of wanting to be like God, when we make ourselves the final authority as opposed to God, are we not guilty of the same sin as Lucifer? Discuss.

SUMMARY: Satan fell by abusing the freedom inherent in love; as a result the great controversy started. As humans, we have that same freedom. In the end, we must use it to make one of two choices: eternal life in Christ or eternal destruction with Satan.



The Kidnappers, Part 1

Daryl Famisaran

In the mountain village of Lapangon, on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines, the villagers decided that their school needed to be replaced. The old one was leaning dangerously and threatened to collapse. The villagers wanted to build a school from materials that would last more than a year. But to do this they needed to raise money to hire a chainsaw operator to cut the trees and for the galvanized iron roofing sheets.

The adults began gathering and selling abacca fiber from which hemp rope is manufactured. The children wanted to help raise money to build their new school. Their mission teachers had taught them to sing, and they wanted to present a concert to raise funds for their school.

The children and their teachers, Romel and Rendy, student missionaries from Mountain View College, planned a fund-raising concert tour in churches in the lowlands. The reluctant parents waved as the excited children and their teachers started down the mountain toward the city. The children, ranging from 9 to 12 years old, had never left their mountain homes before, and their parents wondered if they would ever see their children again.

The children arrived at the bus terminal in the capital city. They were curious about all the strange sights and sounds around them. They wrinkled their foreheads in disbelief at the many people running and shouting directions. They clutched their bundles of clothing and stayed close to their teachers as they walked through the noisy terminal. Most of the children were barefooted and many were dressed in rags, as they dress in the mountains.

As Romel gave the children instructions on proper behavior on the bus, suddenly five policemen approached and spoke to Romel and Rendy.

"You are kidnappers!" they accused.

The children did not understand what the men were saying, but they sensed that something was terribly wrong.

(continued next week)



Romel Mansalo'on (left); Daryl Famisaran is director of the student missionary program at Mountain View College in Mindanao, Philippines.

Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School-Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference
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The Betrayers—Peter and Judas



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 26:69-75; 27:1-9.

MEMORY TEXT: “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times’ ” (Luke 22:61, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: First the good news: Both Peter and Judas were capable, aggressive members of Jesus’ chosen twelve. Now the bad news: Both betrayed (or denied) Jesus within hours of each other.

YOU TOO, PETER? YOU TOO, JUDAS? By anyone’s calculations, Peter and Judas were recognized disciples of Christ. Even as many Bible characters lie in obscurity, Peter and Judas remain two of the best-known. Writers and speakers can allude to either with assurance that the names will be recognized. Even those who read the Bible as great literature only (and not as the Word of God) are familiar with the failure of Peter and Judas.

Historically, most cultures value loyalty of some kind—to family, to country, to church, to friends. Hence, stories of a friend betraying a friend compel universal interest. Julius Caesar’s famous dying cry, “*Tu quoque, fili!*” [Latin for, “And you, too, son!”], uttered in agonizing disbelief as he is stabbed by his so-called friend and adopted son, Brutus, still haunts us two millennia later. How much more compelling the betrayal of the Son of God by two close companions.

There are lessons to be learned from their examples.

SOME POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS.

Read Luke 5:5-11 and think about it as you study the quotes below.

All of the numerous Bible texts that mention Judas are negative, but Ellen White mentions that he had potential.

Judas. *He did respond to Jesus:* “He [Judas] was not insensible to the beauty of the character of Christ; and often, as he listened to the Savior’s words, conviction came to him. . . .”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 558.

He wanted to change: “He [Judas] had sincerely desired a change in himself, and had hoped to experience this through a union with Jesus. But this desire did not become predominant.”—*Education*, p. 91.

He was multigifted: “When he [Judas] came into association with Jesus, he had some precious traits of character that might have been made a blessing to the church.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 295.

Peter. *Peter also was multigifted:* “Peter was prompt and zealous in action, bold and uncompromising; and Christ saw in him material that would be of great value to the church.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 488.

Peter did not want to see Christ humiliated: “Peter could not bear to see his Lord, whom he believed to be the Son of God, acting the part of a servant. His whole soul rose up against this humiliation.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 645, 646.

“Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve” (Luke 22:3).

Satan entered Judas, as opposed to Peter, though Jesus made it clear that Satan wanted Peter as well (Luke 22:31). Obviously, there was something in how these men, both possessing good traits, responded to Christ that made the crucial difference in their lives. However similar their traits, their destinies couldn’t be more different. Both were sinners, both needed forgiveness, both failed their Master—yet one went on to receive the promise of eternal life, the other the promise of eternal damnation. How crucial that we understand the difference between these two men!

What can the story of Judas teach us about the need to surrender ourselves completely to Christ? Why does someone not need to do an act of treachery as blatant as Judas in order to manifest the same spirit toward Christ? What should the fact that Judas was “numbered among the twelve” tell us about assuming that church membership guarantees faithfulness?

THE TWO BETRAYALS (Matt. 27:3, 4; Luke 22:54-62).

Both Peter and Judas sinned knowingly: Judas, “Saying, ‘I have sinned in betraying innocent blood’ ” (Matt. 27:4, RSV); Peter, “And he went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62, RSV).

Scripture is clear about the negative characteristics of Judas. His repentance was, apparently, false (Matt. 27:3). He purposely, with premeditation, worked with evil men to betray Jesus, and he openly betrayed Him (Mark 14:45; John 18:2, 3). Thus, we see here some reasons why Judas’s betrayal of Christ was so different from Peter’s denial.

Contrast the verses that talk about Judas’s plan to betray Jesus with Peter’s words in Matthew 26:35: “Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.” What do these texts reveal about the difference between what Peter and Judas did to Christ?

It’s obvious that Peter never intended to deny Christ; his act was spontaneous, uttered in a moment of fear. In contrast, Scripture shows that Judas acted with premeditation and foresight. In other words, though both men did wrong, and both men revealed character weaknesses, and both men did, indeed, fail their Lord—one carried out his deed with premeditation, while the other acted out of momentary weakness.

In what ways do the different motives of Peter and Judas help explain their different destinies?

Like Judas, Peter also displayed some very negative characteristics. He cursed (Matt. 26:74), he had violent tendencies (John 18:10), and he acted like a coward (Luke 22:57). Peter was very self-assured, very self-confident, very convinced of his loyalty to Christ. However, when the first real test came, he failed miserably.

What do you say to someone who has openly, and with premeditation, sinned against the Lord, as Judas did? In what ways could you give him or her hope that the future does not have to be hopeless? Give some biblical examples of those who have sinned in the same open and planned way that Judas did, and yet who found forgiveness with God. What Christian, at some point in his or her experience, hasn’t been able to relate to Judas?

THE TWO BETRAYALS CONTINUED (Mark 14:10; Luke 22:60).

One with curses, one with coins—the two disciples failed their best Friend on the same day. Yet their acts did not come in a vacuum. Each man had a history that clearly paved the way for his subsequent actions.

Judas: At some point, Judas saw that Christ was offering spiritual promises rather than worldly gain. After hoping for worldly honor and glory, Judas could finally see that Jesus would get no earthly honor or glory for Himself; thus, it was clear to Judas that by following Jesus he would get no honor and glory either. It was at this point that Judas began to draw away from the Master.

Christ bore long with Judas, seeking to save him. At the Last Supper, however, Judas rejected mercy's pleading one last time. Angered at an implied rebuke and disappointed at the failure of his dreams, he refused to surrender and, ultimately, gave his soul to the demon of greed that had long been stalking him.

What examples can we find from Judas's life that showed the direction he had been moving in all along?

Peter: In the same way as Judas, Peter's fall was not instantaneous; it was gradual. Self-confidence led him to the belief that nothing could turn him away from Christ. "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). His bold confession itself showed just how self-deceived Peter was regarding his faith and his relationship to Christ.

In many ways, self-confidence has to be one of the most dangerous sins for Christians because our faith is based on the notion of our own utter helplessness and inability to save ourselves. Peter, obviously, did not understand this principle yet, and so step after step he moved in the path of self-confidence until that trait led him to an open denial of his Lord.

Salvation is found only in the righteousness of Christ, not in ourselves. Yet, what can we learn from the experience of Judas and Peter about the importance of not allowing Satan any inroad into our lives? How does Judas's experience reveal the danger of clinging to cherished sin?

In the end, did Judas's sin drive Jesus away from him, or did it drive Judas away from Jesus? Explain your answer.

THE AFTERMATH (Matt. 27:5; 1 Pet. 1:1).

After he betrayed Christ, Judas hanged himself (Matt. 27:5). In contrast, after he denied Christ, Peter became a trusted apostle (1 Pet. 1:1), a high-powered force leading the early Christian church, and a writer leaving a testimony that would echo down through the centuries. Yet both men outwardly showed repentance for their deeds! What was the difference?

Judas had the wrong type of repentance. Judas, after betraying Christ, returned to the priests and exclaimed: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4). But his confession was not a true biblical confession, not one born out of true sorrow for his actions but born instead only out of sorrow for the *consequences* of his actions. The consequences, not the act itself, drew out this acknowledgment of his sin, but there was (apparently) no deep, heart-breaking grief in his soul over the evil he had done in betraying His Lord.

Peter's remorse was sincere. Peter denied His Lord during Christ's time of greatest need and humiliation. But afterward, Peter repented and was reconverted. He had true contrition of soul for the act itself, not just the consequences. His repentance showed that the Holy Spirit was able to work on his heart and change him. He was truly broken by his sin, and out of that contrition of heart the Lord was able to bring Peter to true repentance and conversion. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17).

Name a Bible character who sinned greatly and then repented and one who sinned greatly and did not repent.

Antonio had committed terrible sins that brought a lot of suffering to himself and his family. Though he loved God and felt sorry for his actions, he wasn't sure if his repentance were genuine, if he were truly sorry for his sins, or just for the terrible consequences of them. What could someone do to help him come to true repentance? (Hint: see Acts 5:31; 2 Tim 2:25.) What do these verses say about the source of true repentance, and how could this give someone like Antonio hope? How do we help such people understand that repentance comes from God?

THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE SAVED (Luke 22:21, 31).

“But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table” (Luke 22:21).

Luke 22:21 shows that, though Jesus knew what Judas would do, He still kept Judas in the group. What lessons, if any, can we learn from Christ’s act? Do you think that Judas could have changed his mind and not betrayed Christ? Explain your answer.

Though a question fraught with certain difficulties, free will is clearly taught in the Bible. Little of what we believe as Christians, much less Adventists, makes sense without free will. Though the Lord knew that Judas would betray Him, God did not predetermine that Judas would do it; otherwise, what sense would it make for Judas to be punished for his betrayal of Christ? Judas obviously had free will, and because the Bible says that the Lord wants all to come to salvation (2 Pet. 3:9), Judas had a chance to be saved as well. Thus, Jesus kept Judas around, not in order to give him ample opportunity to betray Him but, more than likely, to give him ample opportunity to be saved.

Along with Judas, there was Peter, whom Christ wanted to be saved as well. “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31, 32, emphasis supplied). By these words, Jesus revealed that He knew not only that Peter would one day be converted but that he would be a powerful force in the church. As with Judas, Christ’s foreknowledge did not mean He predestined Peter to be this great apostle; rather, Christ, with His foreknowledge, knew what Peter and Judas would do with their free will. In both cases, each man was given the opportunity to react to what Christ offered him. Their biographies reveal the choices they made.

All of us who claim to follow Christ are in the same position as both Peter and Judas. We have been given opportunities to make choices regarding how we will respond to the salvation Christ freely offers. Each of us ought to clearly ask ourselves What are we doing with these opportunities? In the end, only one of two eternal destinies awaits us: the one of Peter or the one of Judas. In what ways are our daily decisions moving us in the path of one or the other? What can we do if we see that perhaps our choices are indeed pointing us in the wrong direction?

FURTHER STUDY: Lessons From Their Lives. What lessons can we learn from these statements regarding the lives of both Peter and Judas?

“No man can tell how far he may go in sin when once he yields himself to the power of the great deceiver. Satan entered into Judas Iscariot and induced him to betray his Lord.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 103.

“At the reproof from Jesus his [Judas’s] very spirit seemed turned to gall. Wounded pride and desire for revenge broke down the barriers, and the greed so long indulged held him in control. This will be the experience of everyone who persists in tampering with sin.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 720.

“The Saviour gave him [Peter] opportunity to regain the confidence of his brethren, and, so far as possible, to remove the reproach he had brought upon the gospel.

“When trouble comes upon us, how often we are like Peter! We look upon the waves, instead of keeping our eyes fixed upon the Saviour. Our footsteps slide, and the proud waters go over our souls. Jesus did not bid Peter come to Him that he should perish; He does not call us to follow Him, and then forsake us. ‘Fear not,’ He says; ‘for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.’ ”
—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 382.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The converted Peter healed the sick, evangelized both Jew and Gentile, and wrote epistles. Why mention that he so miserably failed Christ?
2. The story of Judas is the story of someone who ultimately chose sin over Christ. All professed followers of Christ have to face that same struggle because every day we are confronted with temptations. What can we do to protect ourselves from falling into the same trap?
3. In *The Desire of Ages*, the chapter titled “Judas,” Ellen White writes how Judas actually thought he would be doing Christ a favor by betraying Him. What does that fact tell us about the power of sin to deceive us?

SUMMARY: Peter and Judas will forever be remembered for their betrayals of Christ—Judas only for that act, Peter for that act plus many positive ones. Both disciples had desirable and undesirable character traits. The difference is that one responded to Jesus’ power, the other did not; one had genuine repentance, the other did not.



The Kidnappers, Part 2

Daryl Famisaran

The children from Lapangon Mission School had never been away from their mountain homes before they traveled to the lowlands of southern Philippines to raise money to build a new school. Their nervous parents feared for their safety.

As the children boarded a bus in the capital city, five policemen approached and accused the teachers of kidnapping the children.

"We are not kidnappers," Romel answered. "We are missionaries. We are on a field trip, and the children will present a concert."

"Look at the rags these children are wearing," the police officer roared. "How can you say that these children are singers?"

The two student missionaries showed the police their student missionary identification cards, but the police were not convinced. Romel prayed silently, *Lord, please make this police officer understand.*

"Do we look like kidnappers?" asked Romel. "These children are our pupils at a government recognized mission school in Lapangon village. They have come to the city to raise money to build a new school."

"Prove it!" one police officer ordered. "Have them sing one song."

Romel turned to the children, who had entered the bus, and spoke a few words. Immediately the bus was filled with the sound of trained young voices. They sang a song in Cebuano, the language the police officers could understand. A crowd gathered to listen to the unlikely looking choir.

After the melody faded away, the head officer spoke with a voice choked with tears. "I am sorry to hold you. You may go now."

Rendy and Romel breathed a silent prayer of thanks to the Holy Spirit who had turned a difficult situation into an opportunity to witness for Christ.



Pray that the villagers will raise the needed funds to build their new school. And pray for the student missionaries who teach Manobo children in a dozen mission schools scattered through the mountains of southern Philippines.

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Grace Under Pressure— Noah and Job



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Gen. 6:22; Job 1.

MEMORY TEXT: “Then Job answered the Lord: ‘I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted’ ” (Job 42:1, 2, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: No matter how long, intense, or varied our trials, faith in God can provide the resources for experiencing what has been called “grace under pressure.” Perhaps we’ve all, in one way or another, known what “grace under pressure” means.

ANCIENT STORIES WITH MODERN MESSAGES. Noah-and-the-ark is thought of as almost one word. Likewise, Job-and-his-trials are four words that melt into one. So compelling are the ark and trial portions of their lives that we think of little else when we think of these two men; and no wonder, because those incidents are about the only portions of their lives the Bible dwells upon.

Although Noah lived 950 years, the mention of his name generally conjures up ark images—scoffers, animals in pairs, a rainbow, a dove, an olive leaf, and water (a lot of it). Likewise, Job lived many years after his tribulations, yet the mention of his name compels exclusively suffering images—critical friends, a carping wife, loathsome sores, dirty ashes, verbal battles, and a God who speaks out of a whirlwind.

No matter how ancient, the stories of Noah and Job and their struggles and challenges still resonate today. However different our circumstances from theirs, we still struggle with the same issues of faith, hope, and grace in a world that, at times, can seem wired against all three.

THE STORIES' SETTINGS (Gen. 6:13, 17; Job 1:8-12).

Settings involve the historical backgrounds, the facts about when, where, and who, along with the philosophical environments in which the stories occur. For the biographies of Noah and Job, the settings must be understood before the plot makes sense.

The Bible gives background information for Noah's story: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5, RSV); for Job's narrative: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them" (Job 1:6, RSV). How do these two texts help explain the stories' plots?

The fascinating thing about both these stories is that, however much of the drama takes place on the earth, heaven sets the real background. Genesis states more than once that God (who dwells in heaven) saw what was going on and decided to do something about it. In the book of Job, there is a conflict between God and Satan—in heaven—that winds up on earth. What's taking place on earth has its origins in what's taking place in heaven. In fact, only by understanding that heavenly background can the earthly stories make better sense. What this reality shows is that there is often an unseen, cosmic dimension behind things that we can see and experience ourselves, a dimension that in many ways provides the best explanation for what's going on here. The Bible helps reveal to us this cosmic dimension.

Many people believe that the book of Job was written by Moses and that it was the first book of the Bible ever written, even before Genesis. The book of Job gives one of the clearest explanations about how evil could exist in a world created by an all-loving, all-powerful God. It makes a lot of sense for Job to be the first book because, for many earnest people, the question of evil raises the first and often the hardest question to be answered about the existence of God. Job helps answer that question (even if it still leaves many unanswered).

How could a knowledge of the cosmic battle between Christ and Satan help us deal with the struggles we face? Can a knowledge of this unseen reality help give meaning to trials that might, otherwise, seem so meaningless? If so, how?

NOAH: END-TIME “FANATIC” (Gen. 6:3).

Genesis 6:3 indicates that the Lord would give humanity a 120-year grace period. Then “probation” would close—and the world would be destroyed by a flood. Only those who would accept this present-truth message of “salvation,” offered in that particular context, would be saved.

Scripture doesn’t say exactly how long Noah worked on the ark during that 120-year period. Considering the massive size of the structure, the amount of time must have been immense, even for those who, like Noah, measured their lives by centuries. However long the actual building took, it must have been a real testing time for Noah’s faith. “By faith Noah, being warned of God *of things not seen as yet*, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Heb. 11:7, emphasis supplied).

“In Noah’s day the inhabitants of the old world laughed to scorn what they termed the superstitious fears and forebodings of the preacher of righteousness. He was denounced as a visionary character, a fanatic, an alarmist. ‘As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.’ Men will reject the solemn message of warning in our day, as they did in Noah’s time.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 308.

Noah had to remain faithful for other time periods as well.

How long was he in the ark before water fell? (Gen. 7:10).

How long did the Flood continue? (Gen. 7:17).

How long was it before the waters abated? (Gen. 8:3).

Though these other time periods were much shorter than the many years Noah worked on the ark, it would be easy to imagine that Noah’s faith must have come under intense pressure during these periods as well.

Consider some of the other long time periods in the Bible, such as the 1260 years of Daniel 7 or the 70 years of Babylonian captivity. What can these long time periods teach us about enduring “lengthy” trials in our own lives?

THE TORMENT OF JOB (Job 19:2).

Pain comes in many shapes. Match the types of torment with the text—economic, emotional, parental, physical, social, and spiritual:

_____ “The oxen were plowing and the asses feeding beside them; and the Sabeans . . . slew the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you” (Job 1:14, 15, RSV).

_____ “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine . . . and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you” (Job 1:18, 19, RSV).

_____ “And when they saw him from afar, they did not recognize him” (Job 2:12, RSV).

_____ “There is no umpire between us, who might lay his hand upon us both” (Job 9:33, RSV).

_____ “Why didst thou bring me forth from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me” (Job 10:18, RSV).

_____ “My kinsfolk and my close friends have failed me” (Job 19:14, RSV).

It has been said that times of intense suffering don't develop character but just reveal it. Explain why you agree or disagree.

Job's experience is a reflection, however exaggerated, of all fallen humanity. All, like Job, have had their positive moments; all, like Job, have had their moments of utter despair. However intense Job's sufferings, all have gone through something similar. And, no doubt, even people of faith, people who love God and believe in the wonderful promise of salvation in Christ, have, like Job, questioned the providence of God who has allowed these trials to come. What Job shows is that questioning is part of what faith is all about.

Carla, a devout Christian, lost both her husband and her only child in a house fire. In the midst of her anguish, she had some moments of raw doubt about even the existence of God. Why is such a reaction normal, and what can we learn from the story of Job to help someone like her?

FAITH—THE SOURCE OF PERSISTENCE (Heb. 11:7; Job 19:25).

Noah's persistent faith earned him the title of "a herald of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5, RSV). Job's persistent faith allowed him to proclaim, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25, RSV).

For Noah to be a "herald of righteousness," he had to be preaching about the righteousness of Christ, which is the righteousness of God Himself, the only righteousness that can save us. "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:21, 22; see also Rom. 10:3-6; Rom. 3:17). Job's words affirming the existence of His Redeemer (Job 19:25) show, too, that he had some understanding of salvation and that it is obtained not by man but by God in behalf of man. "This text represents one of the OT revelations of God as man's redeemer, a profound truth that was fully revealed to men in the person and mission of Jesus Christ."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 549.

Why, especially in times of trial, is it crucial to understand that our hope of salvation exists not in ourselves but only in Christ?

Anyone who has ever walked with God knows that the closer we come to Christ, the more sinful we'll appear in our own eyes. Indeed, anyone who has experienced the reality of the human condition and the saving grace of Christ will understand the biblical truth that "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Our sinful condition can be a terrible source of personal discouragement. This is particularly true for a person going through a trial when the tendency is to think that his or her own sin has brought about this trial to begin with. How important, then, especially in hard times, that we ground our hope not in ourselves or in any righteousness found in us but only in Christ and His righteousness, which is credited to us by faith.

What other ways (besides what's mentioned above) can an understanding of our righteousness being found only in Christ, and not in ourselves or our works, be a great source of comfort for a Christian going through a hard time?

In what way can you help a person to see the wonderful truth of Christ as our righteousness, as our hope, and as our salvation?

THE VINDICATIONS (Gen. 9:1-3; Job 42:10-17).

“And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you green plants, I give you everything’ ” (Gen. 9:1-3).

Not all biographers can write happy endings and still be true to the fact. And though one can seriously question whether the word *happy* is the right word to describe the endings of these stories, it is true that after their lengthy and intense trials, both Noah and Job enjoyed several forms of vindication.

Compare these types of vindication for Job with the types of trials he endured (see Tuesday’s lesson):

_____ “The Lord said ‘for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has’ ” (Job 42:7, RSV).

_____ “Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before . . . ” (Job 42:11, RSV).

_____ “Fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses” (Job 42:12, RSV).

_____ “He had also seven sons and three daughters” (Job 42:13, RSV).

_____ “And Job died, an old man, and full of days” (Job 42:17, RSV).

Noah, however, found vindication in another way: The Flood that he had warned about for so long finally came, exactly as he had said. His faith, enduring years of taunts, ridicule, and maybe even his own moment of doubt (he was, after all, human) was radically vindicated. He lived to see the results of living and acting by faith, not by sight.

Noah and Job both lived long enough to see their trials come to a “happy” ending. Not all those who go through trials have the same experience, at least in this life. Why, then, must our ultimate hope of vindication not rest in this life? When and where will vindication finally come?

FURTHER STUDY: Noah, Job, and Us. Read the book of Job in poetic format, the RSV, for example. Also read about the three great races that sprang from Noah's three sons (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 117, 118).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In any discussion about the existence of an all-loving, all-powerful God, the inevitable question of evil arises. As one writer expressed it: "If God is perfectly loving, He must wish to abolish evil; and if He is all powerful, He must be able to abolish evil. But evil exists, therefore God cannot be both omnipotent and loving." (Quoted in *Philosophy: An Introduction Through Literature* [New York: Kleiman and Lewis Paragon House, 1992], p. 457). How can we, as Christians (particularly as Adventists with the understanding of the great controversy between Christ and Satan), help deal with that idea? What kind of responses can you give? Are there any answers, this side of eternity, that can perfectly address this issue?
2. Read the great faith chapter, Hebrews 11. You will notice a constant reference to the promises of God. You will also notice that this promise is, ultimately, not of anything in this life but the promise of a new existence altogether. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:13-16). In the context of this week's lesson, that of intense suffering, why are promises like this so crucial? In what ways can we live our lives to help us—and others—develop the kind of faith needed to cling to these promises?

SUMMARY: Noah and Job survived a variety of very long and very intense trials. Some of the most difficult times involved their being misunderstood and, consequently, maligned by those who should have been supporters. A persistent faith kept them clinging to God's grace under the most severe of pressures.



A Spark Ignited

J. H. Zachary

Warren Uziyah lives in his wife's family village in North New Georgia, Solomon Islands. Although he comes from a strong Protestant background, Uziyah had recently become interested in his wife's religion, Seventh-day Adventism.

Uziyah decided to visit his father, who is chief in another village. Before he left he asked his mother-in-law for some books and literature to take along to share in his village. She gave him some copies of *The Desire of Ages*, *Steps to Christ*, and *The Great Controversy*, as well as some magazines and tracts.

During his visit Uziyah gave the books and tracts to people who seemed interested. And when he returned home, he gave his mother-in-law a list of people who wanted to take Bible studies by correspondence. She happily enrolled them in the Voice of Prophecy course.

One person who received a book from Uziyah was his cousin, Ron Kanga. As Kanga began reading the book, he discovered several new ideas that caught his attention. The book gave him a clearer picture of God's plan for the universe and for his own life. By the time he finished reading the book, his life was changed.

Kanga was so excited by what he had discovered that he began visiting people to share what he had learned. He began studying the Bible with several of his friends and relatives. Soon he was studying regularly with 20 people in the village. Sometimes his studies lasted until long after midnight.

Kanga wanted to be baptized. He knew that the book that had changed his life was published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, so he contacted the nearest mission and asked for someone to come and baptize him. A pastor came to visit him and question him about his knowledge of Bible truth. Kanga and his wife were baptized late in 1998.

Kanga told the pastor that several of the people he was studying with in his village would soon be ready for baptism as well. The pastor asked Kanga what he was using for Bible study materials. Kanga answered simply, "Just these." And he held up his Bible and *The Great Controversy*. The pastor is confident that with Kanga's zeal, soon his village will have an Adventist congregation.

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Wives as Advisers



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Prov. 20:18.

MEMORY TEXT: ““And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”” (Esther 4:14b, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: So lovingly intimate is the ideal relationship between husband and wife that the Bible uses a bride and groom as a metaphor, or symbol, for Christ and His church. Although men (often husbands) dominate the Scriptures, women (often wives) play a few major and many minor roles. Scattered throughout the Bible are occasional brief stories describing wives as advisers to their husbands.

WIVES FUNCTIONED AS UNOFFICIAL ADVISERS. Bible biographies tell mainly of men—young and old, good and bad, king or slave, prophet or rebel. No doubt, many reasons for this exist, one being, simply, that the society in which the Bible stories took place was overtly dominated by men. In fact, only two books of the Bible are even titled with a woman's name. Yet women have had crucial roles to play in this great drama called *Planet Earth*, roles that will continue until the close of time.

This week we study wives who gave advice, both good and bad, to their husbands, thus advancing from a customary domestic role to that of spiritual, political, and moral counselor. What kind of advice did they give, and how effective was it? Did the husbands listen, and what happened when they did? What happened, on the other hand, when they did not? What lessons are here in the stories both for husbands and for wives? How little some basic things change, even after many centuries.

GOOD ADVICE FOLLOWED (1 Sam. 25:24, 25; Esther 8:4-6).

Biographers analyze people or events that impacted the lives of those they write about, often seeing great importance in brief encounters or experiences. These experiences, and how the people respond to them, are what make them worthy of biography. Both King Ahasuerus and David had high-voltage advice given to them by two very shrewd, prudent, and courageous women, Esther and Abigail, whose stories were deemed important enough to be placed in the biblical canon. Esther jeopardized her position as queen by instigating the events that led up to the advice she gave the king; by contrast, Abigail's advice to David resulted in her being chosen as a wife.

Foolish men, wise women. Both of these stories tell of men who were not acting with great wisdom but who allowed greed, jealousy, and anger to dominate their actions. In contrast, the stories also showed women who worked hard, even at great personal risk, to avert the bad consequences that could have come about because of these men.

Scan 1 Samuel 25 to get the background for the story of Abigail and how she worked with tact, shrewdness, sensitivity, and risk to try and mitigate something that a foolish man had done. In verse 24, when she approached David, she said, "Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be." What principle do we see in operation here, where an innocent person is willing to take the punishment for the guilty?

Esther, too, had to work with tact, sensitivity, and risk to prevent a calamity that could have been caused by a man who was allowing passion and anger to dominate. In her case, however, the issues at stake were much greater than in Abigail's, for the safety of her people was endangered. Haman had planned to wipe out the whole Jewish population simply because of his pride and arrogance.

Like Abigail, though, she was willing to take a great risk in order to give advice to her husband. Indeed, she had to stand before him, at the risk of death. The king listened to her advice, and Haman's foul plot was stopped.

These two accounts reveal remarkable women who took great risks to attempt to avert evil. In both cases, they acted, in a sense, as intercessors, or even as saviors (with a small "s"). In what ways was what these women had done similar to what Christ has done for us?

GOOD ADVICE IGNORED (Esther 6:13; Matt. 27:19).

If Haman had heeded his wife's words, he probably would have spared himself an untimely and ignoble death: "Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, 'If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him'" (Esther 6:13b, RSV).

Given Haman's attitude toward Mordecai, why do you think he refused to heed the advice of his wife? Why do you think she was able to see what Haman himself couldn't? What lessons can we learn from Haman's blindness about allowing emotions to overrule common sense and good advice?

In the same way, if Pilate had followed his wife's advice, he would have saved himself a lot of grief: "'Have nothing to do with that righteous man,'" she said to him, "'for I have suffered much over him today in a dream'" (Matt. 27:19b, RSV).

The story of Pilate's wife's dream becomes especially poignant because of the insights of another woman who heeded the voice of God. Look at what Ellen White adds to our understanding of what Pilate's wife saw in her dream: "In answer to Christ's prayer, the wife of Pilate had been visited by an angel from heaven, and in a dream she had beheld the Saviour and conversed with Him. Pilate's wife was not a Jew, but as she looked upon Jesus in her dream, she had no doubt of His character or mission. She knew Him to be the Prince of God. She saw Him on trial in the judgment hall. She saw the hands tightly bound as the hands of a criminal. . . . Still another scene met her gaze. She saw Christ seated upon the great white cloud, while the earth reeled in space, and His murderers fled from the presence of His glory."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 732.

Augustine once said: "Sin is to nature what blindness is to an eye." In this context, why do you think Pilate refused to listen to the advice of his wife? What reasons, in comparison to Haman, did he have for his refusal? Isn't it easy to see how some of the same things that blinded Haman and Pilate to good counsel (indeed, some came directly from the Lord Himself!) can blind us as well? What steps can we take to prevent ourselves from falling into the same trap as these two unfortunate men? In other words, what things exist in our lives that are blinding us from seeing what we need to see?

BAD ADVICE FOLLOWED (Gen. 3:6; Gen. 16:1, 2).

The closeness of the husband-and-wife relationship does not guarantee good advice. The familiar story of the original Fall leaves no doubt as to Eve's guilt—and Adam's. Likewise, Abram and Sarai both sinned when he took Hagar as a wife. The lesson is clear: Those who influence others to sin are themselves sinning.

Sin in bunches. A single sin is hard to commit. It seems, as if by its demonic nature, sin rarely goes solo but instead clusters with other sins, each one feeding off the other. The case of Eve and the Fall exemplifies this principle. Her first error was wandering away from her husband's side. Next, she lingered around the forbidden tree. She then listened to the voice of the serpent, even daring to doubt God's words about not eating from the tree. Trusting her own judgment and sight—as opposed to the clear command of God—Eve ate from the tree. Then “she offered the fruit to her husband, thereby tempting him.”—*Early Writings*, pp. 147, 148.

After both fell, what was their first reaction? “The man said, ‘The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’ Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.’” (Gen. 3:12, 13, RSV). Why is it so natural for us to blame others for our sin?

What modern story can compete with the tale of the love triangle between the rich and influential Abraham, the beautiful but barren Sarah, and an Egyptian maid? The determined characters, the intriguing plot, the oriental setting, the conniving, and then backfiring—all captivate the imagination.

The narrative started millennia ago with a wife's wrong advice: “And Sarai said to Abram, ‘Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.’ And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai” (Gen. 16:2, RSV).

Both Eve and Sarai (even Adam and Abram) made the same fatal mistake: They trusted their sight, their reason, and their emotions over a clear thus saith the Lord. Why is it so easy to make the same mistake? How can we learn to trust God despite what our senses, or even reason, sometimes tell us, especially when our senses and our reason can so easily deceive us?

**BAD ADVICE REJECTED AND BAD ADVICE FOLLOWED
(Job 2:9, 10; Mark 6:24).**

Only two verses mention her. She merits no name except Job's wife. Yet the world knows her well, even if the Bible records just a few quick words she uttered in sheer pain: "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die!" (Job 2:9b, RSV). In many ways, the poor woman has received bad press. Remember—all *her* possessions were just taken away too, all *her* children were killed, and that was *her* husband who was reduced from being "the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job 1:3) to a diseased, whining wreck left on a pile of rubble.

While her reaction wasn't right—it certainly is understandable!

Job responded to his wife like this: "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10, RSV). Though both his *and* her sufferings were terrible, what was the main difference in their reaction? What, possibly, could have caused the difference?

Job, clearly, had a hold on God that his wife, at least at the time, didn't—which is why he overtly rejected her "advice." Though we are given no more information about his wife, other than her painful cry, the Bible does depict Job as a righteous, faithful man who continually worshiped the Lord (Job 1:1-5). No doubt his relationship to God and past faithfulness was able to sustain him during this crisis.

Job's wife uttered her words in the midst of a spontaneous outburst of pain, but Herod's wife's advice was calculated, cold, and pure evil. At first, Herod refused Herodias's sinister plot to kill John the Baptist, because he knew "that he was a righteous and holy man" (Mark 6:20, RSV). Unfortunately, in the midst of a decadent party (Mark 6:17-29), Herod gave in to his wife's words and had John beheaded, even though it went deeply against his conscience.

Herod's story, in particular, shows how powerful the emotions and senses can be, even when pitted against conscience and reason. No wonder Scripture talks so much about keeping our bodies and sensual pleasures under control. Think of areas in your own life that could leave you open to the same disastrous mistake Herod made and ask yourself, What can I do to avoid the same folly?

THE PRINCIPLE OF PRINCIPLE (Esther 1:9-12; Gen. 39:12).

The Bible is not a book that ignores human flaws; on the contrary, it exposes them—if not with lucid detail, then certainly with no gloss. Scripture makes no pretense to hide our faults, even the faults of the heroes of faith. How nice, then, when we're given examples of those who, despite the traps of lust, vanity, and pride, stand firm for principle.

The setting (read Esther 1, RSV). King Ahasuerus gives a seven-day banquet—lavish, long, and decadent—for his court.

The point of contention. Gorgeous Queen Vashti refuses to flaunt her beauty as commanded to the drunken audience. The refusal escalates to a national crisis: “For this deed of the queen will be made known to all women, causing them to look with contempt upon their husbands, since they will say, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come’” (vs. 17).

The result. Vashti, standing on principle despite great personal cost to herself, lost her position as queen.

Little is known about this remarkable woman, Vashti, who, even in such a male-dominated culture, refused to compromise her modesty. In what ways could she have easily rationalized a decision to obey the king's order? Write down a few “good” reasons.

1. _____
2. _____

In comparison, there's also the story of Joseph and his master's wife:

The setting (Gen. 39). “So Joseph found favor in his [Potiphar's] sight and attended him, and he . . . put him in charge of all that he had” (vs. 4, RSV).

The point of contention. Because Joseph was “handsome and good-looking” (vs. 6), Potiphar's wife lusted for the appealing youth. “And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie with her or to be with her” (vs. 10, RSV).

The result. Potiphar's wife told lies about Joseph that caused him to be imprisoned.

In both cases, those who stood for principle suffered painful consequences. Think of people today who, because they refused to compromise truth, have suffered terribly. What lessons can we draw from their experiences?

FURTHER STUDY: Wives as Cooperators (Study passages below).

The following couples illustrate husbands and wives who functioned in agreement. Although the Bible records no explicit instruction the wife gave her husband, what is described suggests that there must have been intense discussions preceding their activities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Some couples united in evil-doing; others united in doing God's will. Discuss the possible rationale that each couple could have used in making the decision that they did; at the same time what rationale could they have used to have acted differently?

United in evil: Ahab and Jezebel.

1 Kings 16:31: Ahab marries Jezebel.

1 Kings 18:4: Jezebel persecutes God's prophets.

1 Kings 18:17: Ahab asks Elijah if Elijah is the one who is troubling Israel.

1 Kings 19:1, 2: Ahab tells Jezebel about Elijah; she then vows to take Elijah's life.

United in evil: Ananias and Sapphira.

Acts 5:1: The couple sells a piece of property.

Acts 5:2, RSV: "and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet."

Acts 5:3-5: Peter questions Ananias; then Ananias dies. Acts 5:7-10: Peter questions Sapphira; then she dies.

United for good: Joseph and Mary.

Luke 1:26-56: Mary believes incredible information.

Matt. 1:18-25: Joseph follows wondrous instructions.

Luke 2:7: Jesus is born.

SUMMARY: If you think of witnessing as an activity you do alone, reflect on the couples studied this week, contemplating the compound impact each pair made. Their actions influenced others—for good or for evil—at the time they were initially done, and their behaviors still witness, either for good or for evil, as their Bible records continue to be studied by millions.



Blessings Amid Terror, Part 1

J. H. Zachary

Indonesia has been wracked with economic and political turmoil. Riots in the city of Solo left dozens dead and countless homes and businesses destroyed. However, God has brought good out of terror and destruction.

Melly had worked hard to build a profitable electronics business. Her customers liked her gentle ways and honest dealings. As the business grew, she spent more and more time in the shop.

"All I could think of was business, business, business," Melly said. She even became reluctant to leave her store closed while she attended church on Sunday. Often during worship service she found herself watching the clock and thinking about the customers that would be waiting for her to open the store.

Then the riots hit. Mobs of angry protestors ran through the city streets looting and burning automobiles, businesses, homes, and government offices.

Melly was not home at the time. She received a phone call from her frantic sister saying, "Don't come home! Everything is gone." Melly's electronics store, along with her home above it, was one of more than 200 businesses destroyed during the riots.

Out of work, Melly had a lot of time to think. She turned to God for answers and consolation. When she received an invitation to attend evangelistic meetings, she went. Night after night she sat on the front row listening, looking up Bible verses, and taking careful notes.

After several nights she testified, "I now understand that the loss of my business was a blessing. Now I have time for God; now I can study the Bible; now I have peace in my heart. I want to be baptized."

A few days later she joyfully announced that her sister, whom she had invited to attend with her, also asked to be baptized.



(continued next week)

Melly (left) lost everything in the riots, but she found a new relationship with her Savior. J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour and a special consultant for the General Conference Ministerial Association.

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Joseph: From Pit to Palace



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Read (as much as possible) the Joseph saga in Genesis 30–50.

MEMORY TEXT: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9b, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: As one of the most detailed biographies in Scripture, the narrative of Joseph highlights his life, from birth to death. From a biographer's viewpoint, he is a complex character, a first-magnitude star who deserves all the space given him in Scripture. There are a lot of lessons, subtle and not so subtle, to be learned from the Joseph saga.

WHAT A STORY! What novelist could invent such a tale? A biographer of Joseph need only record the facts to unravel a fascinating narrative. His story contains it all—the tensions of his birth; the jealous dealings of his older brothers; the suspenseful murder plot; the fabricated cover-up; the terrifying trip to Egypt (with time to reflect on his altered circumstances from indulged favorite to slave); the politics of Potiphar's household and the subsequent seduction attempt; the despair of the prison; the rise to power as an interpreter of dreams; the years of plenty and the years of famine; the fight for emotional control at the sight of his brothers; the money planted in the sacks and the missing cup; the tests of the brothers' reformed characters; the revelation as to who Joseph was; the unbelievable reunion of father and son.

Truth is, indeed, stranger than fiction.

THE EARLY YEARS (Gen. 30:22-24).

Two sisters are married to one husband who loves one sister noticeably more than the other. Hardly a formula for a happy home, to say the least. But the animosity heightens when the lesser-loved wife, Leah, has six sons—and Rachel, the other wife, has none.

“Give me children, or I shall die!” Rachel finally cries out in desperation (Gen. 30:1, RSV). Then, when Joseph finally is born, the jubilant Rachel asks for another son (Gen. 30:24), whom she gets.

In what ironic way is this request answered? Gen. 35:16-20.

Brought forth into a troubled household, then left motherless at Benjamin’s birth, Joseph next appears in Scripture as a seventeen-year-old shepherding flocks with his older brothers. The relation between Joseph and his brothers is not presented as healthy, to be sure. See Genesis 37:2.

The tensions heighten when Jacob demonstrates his partiality to Joseph by tailoring him a special robe: “But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him” (Gen. 37:4, RSV). The situation worsens when Joseph decides to tell his brothers of a dream that he had.

What contents of the dream particularly offend the brothers? Gen. 37:5-8.

If that were not offensive enough, Joseph dreams again, and this time even his indulgent father becomes irritated: “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?” (Gen. 37:10, RSV).

The story of Joseph’s early years reveals the importance of a good family life, especially for children. In fact, how we’re raised as children radically impacts who we are as adults. Indeed, often by the time we are five or six, our characters for life are formed. How crucial, then, for parents to do all they can to love, nurture, and provide all the emotional stability possible for a child.

Jessica was raised in an abusive home; the emotional scars followed her into adulthood. What biblical promises can you hold out to someone like her about the power of God to heal, even when the damage goes so deep?

THE DREAMER COMETH (Gen. 37:19-25).

Evidently neither Jacob nor Joseph realized the intensity of the brothers' hatred, or Jacob never would have sent Joseph to them (Gen. 37:14). So deep was their feeling that they, actually, "conspired against him to slay him" (vs. 18). It's hard to imagine a family so dysfunctional that brothers would conspire to kill one of their own. Fortunately, one son suggested an alternative: just throw the boy in a pit (as a ploy to later save him from death). Though the plan kept Joseph alive, it still didn't save him from being sold into slavery.

What fact helped the brothers decide it would be best not to kill Joseph? Gen. 37:27.

Biographers stress single life-changing events. Often when famous people are interviewed, the interviewer seeks to find out about a single event that radically impacted the person's life. Rarely, however, are such single events as dramatic as Joseph's transition from favored son to slave! And yet, even in this calamity, the Bible says that "The Lord was with Joseph" (Gen. 39:2).

How does one reconcile the text that says "the Lord was with Joseph" with the fact that the boy was still taken into captivity? Why couldn't the Lord have spared him from such a trauma? What does this incident teach us about assuming that, when tragedy comes, the Lord has forsaken us?

Though many people in Joseph's situation could have become bitter and angry over their fate, blaming everyone else (including God) for their problems, inspiration says that this "one day's experience had been the turning point in Joseph's life. Its terrible calamity had transformed him from a petted child to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 214.

Though true that tragedies can, at times, make people noble, strong, and even into more faithful Christians, it's also true that tragedies can also break people, make them hateful, and cause them to lose faith. While it's easy to draw inspiration and courage from the former, how can we help the latter, those whose tragedies hardly have turned them into a Joseph?

THE SEDUCTRESS (Gen. 39:6-23).

In fifth century B.C., Sophocles wrote a play called *Antigone*, in which the heroine, Antigone, chooses to face death rather than obey King Creon's decree forbidding her to give a proper burial to her brother, killed in a revolt. Antigone's words, in which she said that if burying her brother "were a crime, then it's a crime that God demands," have been cited as one of the world's first accounts of people seeking to obey a higher, unwritten law over any man-made decree or demand. Yet in Joseph's refusal to succumb to the advances of his master's wife, another example of the same principle was found—maybe a thousand years before *Antigone* was written!

What was it in Joseph's response to her advances that showed he was acting out of a higher law than even any man-made law against adultery? See Gen. 39:9.

Had Joseph succumbed to her advances, he would have sinned against himself, against his master, and even against his master's wife. And yet, in his cry, he expressed concern about sinning "against God." Joseph, apparently, understood something of the nature of sin as it relates to God Himself. Many centuries later, David, after committing adultery and murder, lamented in his prayer of confession to the Lord that "against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:4)—even though he took another man's wife and then killed the man! Each of these sinners realized the heinous nature of sin and that his sin reached even to heaven.

In what ways, when we commit sin, are we sinning against God? What does that mean, and why would David and Joseph stress that aspect of their sin over other aspects?

Joseph, again, through no fault of his own, found himself in a bad situation: this time in a dungeon, where according to Psalm 105:18, his "feet" were "hurt with fetters," and "he was laid in iron." How easy it would have been for him to succumb to discouragement and bitterness.

Joseph took a stand that cost him dearly. When was the last time you took a stand that cost you something? And if you haven't, is it because no "opportunity" came, or is it because when you did, you chose the easy way out?

FROM PRISON TO PALACE (Gen. 41:39-45).

Even in prison, Joseph's talents blossomed: "And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison; and whatever was done there, he was the doer of it; the keeper of the prison paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper" (Gen. 39:22, 23, RSV).

"The part which Joseph acted in connection with the scenes of the gloomy prison, was that which raised him finally to prosperity and honor. God designed that he should obtain an experience by temptations, adversity, and hardships, to prepare him to fill an exalted *position*."—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 146 (emphasis supplied).

Review the stories of the butler's, baker's, and Pharaoh's dreams (Genesis 40; 41). Though the butler ignored Joseph's request, only when it became self-serving to mention Joseph did he do so (Gen. 41:8-14). What does this episode teach us about how the Lord can use selfish actions for good?

How ironic—having angered his brothers with his dream and interpretations, Joseph was thrown into a pit; now he was being taken out of a prison pit because he could interpret dreams!

Wisely, Joseph's interpretation of the seven fat and seven lean years dream came with a proposal: "Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt," gathering food from the years of plenty to provide for the years of famine (Gen. 41:33-36, RSV). The man picked for that task was Joseph. Thus, he went from being a despised prisoner to one of the most powerful and honored and influential men in all Egypt. See Genesis 41:39-43.

There is no doubt that Joseph maintained his integrity in times of adversity and hardship. Now, as he was going to a position of great wealth, power, and prestige, he would face a whole new set of trials and temptations. In what ways would Joseph's new position pose a greater danger to his walk with God than he previously faced? What examples do we find in the Bible of great people corrupted by wealth and power?

THE DREAM FULFILLED (Gen. 45:1-4).

“Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth” (Gen. 41:57, RSV).

So came the brothers of Joseph as well. And though they had sold Joseph into slavery many years earlier—their first thought after Joseph put them in jail was that this trial was a punishment for their sin!

“And they said one to another, *We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required*” (Gen. 42:21, 22, emphasis supplied).

What does this incident show about the power of a guilty conscience, even so long after the sin was first committed? What other examples are found in Scripture that show the power of a guilty conscience? Judas is one, Herod is another. What others can you think of?

Joseph could have revealed himself to his brothers right away. Instead, he put them through a painful trial in order to test their character, to see if they had changed (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 225). Especially poignant was the plea of Judah, willing to stay in bondage in Egypt rather than leave his younger brother Benjamin there to suffer that fate (Gen. 44:33). Joseph, satisfied about their change, then revealed himself to them (Gen. 45:3).

Though, no doubt, the happy turn of events for Joseph certainly could have helped him forgive, it would be understandable, at least from a human perspective, if he had extracted revenge on his brothers. Instead of seeking revenge, he sought, instead, to teach his brothers a few lessons for their own good. Joseph’s actions show the grace of God working in his life, even as he stood at the pinnacle of power in an overtly heathen land.

One of the greatest struggles we deal with is the question of forgiveness. All of us, to some degree or another, have suffered unfairly at the hands of others. What can we learn from the Joseph story about the power of forgiveness? Also, why does forgiveness often bring more benefits to the one forgiving than to the one forgiven?

FURTHER STUDY: Joseph, a Type of Christ (Gen. 50:20, 21).

In addition to the extensive references in Genesis, Joseph merits mention in twelve other books of the Bible. But what an even greater distinction to be a symbolic Christ figure: “The integrity of Joseph and his wonderful work in preserving the lives of the whole Egyptian people were a representation of the life of Christ.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 286.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways do the following excerpts suggest parallels between the life of Christ and of Joseph? “By his wisdom and justice, by the purity and benevolence of his daily life, by his devotion to the interests of the people . . . Joseph was a representative of Christ.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 219, 220. “When Joseph’s brethren acknowledged their sin before him, he freely forgave them, and showed by his acts of benevolence and love that he harbored no resentful feelings for their former cruel conduct toward *him*.”—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 176 (emphasis supplied).
2. Though his brothers meant evil to Joseph, the Lord turned it into good (Gen. 50:20). Suppose, however, Joseph’s situation had turned out very differently, in that he didn’t prosper in Egypt but suffered terribly the whole time. Would he have been so likely to forgive? What evidence does the Bible (or Spirit of Prophecy) give regarding Joseph’s life and character that could help us answer this speculative question?

SUMMARY: Not only is Joseph a Christ-figure, but his whole life duplicates the pattern of the human race: starting out in the bliss of Eden, humanity soon plunged into the pits of evil, now thousands of years later still looking for the deliverance promised in Revelation. Likewise Joseph’s favored-child existence ended in a literal pit, miraculously surviving that ordeal to experience the trials and triumphs of life in Egypt, the land of sojourn. He ultimately lived a prominent, fulfilled, godly life. We must remind ourselves of the glorious truth the story illustrates: God’s love still saves abandoned sinners from the pit of hopelessness!



Blessings Amid Terror, Part 2

J. H. Zachary

Dr. Rudyanto is an Adventist physician and businessman living in Solo, Indonesia. One morning he awoke to the sounds of angry shouting and stones bouncing off the metal doors of his furniture shop that adjoined his home. From his window he could see flames devour a business across the street.

The police were powerless to stop the rampaging mobs. The family gathered to ask for God's protection.

The hail of stones increased. Then the doctor heard someone trying to break through the heavy iron doors that protected the building. If the rioters succeeded, the doctor's family would be in serious danger.

Suddenly another group of voices began shouting in front of the building. Dr. Rudyanto watched amazed as some 25 Muslim men pushed their way through the mob and refused to let the rioters destroy the building. Dr. Rudyanto recognized the men; they lived in a small settlement of poor families nearby. He had treated many of their medical needs, often for free if they could not pay.

Now these neighbors stood between the rioters and the doctor's family, shouting, "Please leave! The doctor is a good man; he is our friend. Do not harm his property!" After the mob moved on, the Muslim men remained to guard the building as other rioters stormed down the street, stealing and destroying everything they could.

One of their Muslim friends urged the Rudyanto family to come to their home, where they would be safer. The family slipped out the rear door and followed the man home. They remained in the home of their friend until the riots ended.

Why did these Muslims risk their lives to protect a Christian family? "They are our friends," one man answered. "When we are sick or in need, they help us."

Although no Adventists were reported killed during the riots, some lost everything they owned. Please pray for Indonesia and for the Adventist believers there.



Dr. Rudyanto and one of his Muslim friends (left). J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour and a special consultant for the General Conference Ministerial Association.

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Sibling Rivalry



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Read in context the text, or texts, at the beginning of each day's study.

MEMORY TEXT: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The devil delights to pollute whatever has the greatest potential for good. Aware of the comfort that God intends an ideal sibling relationship could bring, Satan encourages contention to counter any positive benefits.

SIBLING REFERENCES PERMEATE THE SCRIPTURES. *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* lists about five hundred texts that reference brothers or sisters, suggesting that the relationship is important to document. One famous text stresses, by implication, the power of this genetic bond: "There are friends who pretend to be friends, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24, RSV). The proverb says, as it were, "Can you believe that in spite of the fact that fake friends do exist, it is still entirely possible to have a friend who will be more loyal than even a brother!" Notwithstanding the close genetic and environmental ties siblings share, many corrupt the relationship with strife. Even twins contend.

Using the tools of psychology, biographers debate the causes of sibling rivalry: gender issues, age differences, birth order, parental favorites, physical characteristics, personality types, natural talents, and spiritual orientations.

As you study the siblings discussed this week, analyze the causes of the contention. Then ask, "Was the one sibling totally right and the other completely wrong?"

CAIN AND ABEL (Gen. 4:9; 1 John 3:12).

There's an incredible irony in the Cain and Abel story, an irony brought out in Hebrews 11:4: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh." Though Hebrews 11 is the great faith chapter, in most every instance, faith is made manifest by works. Even Abel's offering of an animal sacrifice, as opposed to Cain's offering of the "fruit of the ground," is represented as a work of faith, a deed expressing his dependence upon Another's righteousness for his own salvation. In contrast, Cain's fruit offering is rejected, not being an act of faith but an act borne out of self-dependence and self-righteousness and the idea being that our works are good enough to make us acceptable to God.

How is the gospel expressed in the Cain-and-Abel story?

Why would Abel, trusting in the coming Sacrifice in his behalf, be described as having righteous works? (1 John 3:12). Did his works make him righteous, or were they merely an expression of the righteousness he had by faith?

Except for three negative New Testament references (Heb. 11:4; 1 John 3:12; Jude 11), Cain is mentioned only in Genesis 4. One chapter, one deed . . . how tragic to be defined for eternity by an action that probably took less than a minute.

By comparison, except for four positive New Testament references (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:51; Heb. 11:4; Heb. 12:24), Abel is also mentioned only in Genesis 4, where he's depicted as the victim of a vindictive and guilty sibling.

Scripture doesn't detail the story of Cain and Abel; it focuses mostly on the murder. Yet the murder didn't happen in a vacuum: many other less dramatic things preceded this sad climax. In other words, years of events led up to each brother playing his distinct role. Read as much as possible the chapter "Cain and Abel Tested" in Patriarchs and Prophets (pp. 71-79), to see just how this principle was manifested in this tragic tale.

Cain and Abel symbolize two classes of people: the saved and the lost. What aspects of Cain do you see in yourself? What aspects of Abel? Remembering that sooner or later one aspect will ultimately rule over the other, what right choices can you make now to ensure you're symbolized more by Abel, not Cain?

JACOB AND ESAU—THE TWINS (Gen. 25:27).

“The first came forth red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob” (Gen. 25:25, 26a, RSV).

Their differences showed early, as did the parental preferences: “When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his game; but Rebekah loved Jacob” (Gen. 25:27, 28, RSV).

Though we can’t do anything about genetics, environment—to a large degree—has a big role to play in child development. What mistakes did the parents make that led to such a rift?

Review the details of the plot Rebekah and Jacob devised to trick Isaac (Gen. 27:5-29). When Jacob expressed disdain for the plot, his mother said, “‘Let your curse be on me, my son’ ” (Gen. 27:13, NKJV). When the plot didn’t turn out as planned, she later on cried out, “‘Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?’” (Gen. 27:45, RSV). Though Rebekah managed to spare Jacob’s life by urging him to flee, she probably never saw him again. What a sad price a doting mother had to pay for her deceit!

Give other examples from the Bible where those who sought to obtain blessings through deceit reaped only sorrow.

Safely away from Esau, Jacob’s problem goes on hold for twenty years; however, the inevitable reunion with his brother comes. Review the account of their meeting, as depicted in Genesis 32 and 33, looking specifically at Jacob’s night of wrestling with the Angel (32:22-32) and discuss the ways in which that incident helped prepare Jacob for the meeting with his brother (read “The Night of Wrestling” in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 195-203). What elements caused this story to have a happy ending? In many ways, it’s a testimony to the grace of God working in the lives of repentant sinners.

Few people ever escape the grip of guilt, especially when their sin causes pain to others. What lessons can we learn from the story of Esau and Jacob to help those struggling with guilt because of sin?

TWO AGAINST ONE: MIRIAM AND AARON VERSUS MOSES (Num. 12:1, 2).

Though this lesson focuses on an unfortunate incident between Moses and his siblings, prior to that time the Bible shows them in moments of great harmony. Look at the courage of Miriam in saving the life of her baby brother (Exod. 2:1-10). Likewise, Aaron and Moses did great things together: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you; and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land'" (Exod. 7:1, 2, RSV). Also it was Miriam, now a prophetess, who led out with music and dance in celebration of the great victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea. And it was Aaron who held up Moses' tired hands during battle (Exod. 15, 16, and 17).

Unfortunately, as in all relationships, the good times don't always last. See Numbers 12:1, 2. Though Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses' wife, a deeper issue comes to the surface in this confrontation. What is it, and why is it so bad?

We tend to think of sibling rivalry as something that happens between children, not married adults; yet, clearly, in this incident both Aaron and Miriam show jealousy regarding Moses' exalted position. What made their actions even worse was that both had already been greatly favored by the Lord. Yet even amid all the miraculous events, Aaron and Miriam allowed themselves to be caught up in the original sin (Lucifer was jealous of Christ's position). In contrast, see what Numbers 12:3 says about Moses and his character. In many ways this simple verse explains why Moses, not Aaron nor Miriam, was chosen for the exalted position he held.

When the Lord decided to punish Miriam by giving her leprosy, who interceded for her? Moses—the one whom they originally sinned against. "So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, 'Please heal her, O God, I pray!'" (Num. 12:13, NKJV). What lessons can we learn here about forgiveness of those who sin against us?

What was it about Moses that enabled him, immediately after being so offended, to nevertheless seek forgiveness for his sister? In what ways was Moses acting as a "type" for Christ?

MARY AND MARTHA (Luke 10:40).

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11:5, RSV).

Through the brief account of the minor contention between Martha and Mary during one of Jesus’ visits to their home, an important spiritual lesson is given.

Read Luke 10:38-42 carefully before noting these comments that flesh out the significance of the brief story.

Verse 38: “Though Luke does not name it here, the ‘village’ was clearly Bethany (see John 11:1), and this was Jesus’ first visit to it (see DA 525).

Verse 39: “Whereas Martha, being in charge of the home, was by nature of a practical turn of mind, Mary was less concerned with material things than with spiritual things.

Verse 40: “Martha probably realized from past experience that nothing would be gained by an appeal to Mary directly. . . . In appealing to Jesus, Martha not only blamed Mary but indirectly censured Jesus as well. The real trouble, she implied, lay in the fact that He did “not care” about the situation or intend to do anything about it—that He was more pleased to have Mary listen to Him than to have her assist in preparing the meal.

Verse 41: “Repetition of a name implies affection and sometimes concern. . . . Those who become followers of Jesus should avoid the spirit of anxious care that moved Martha in her petulant appeal to Jesus.

Verse 42: “Martha was diligent, prompt, and energetic, but lacked the calm, devotional spirit of her sister Mary (see DA 525). She had not learned the lesson set forth in Matt. 6:33, of making the kingdom of God first in her interests and endeavors, and of allotting material things a subordinate role (see vs. 24-34). . . . The material things in which Martha interested herself could be taken away (see chs. 12:13-21; 16:25, 26). Mary was storing up ‘treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth’ (Luke 12:33; see on Matt. 6:19-21).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 785, 786.

Martha was attempting to serve the Lord by being diligent at work. Yet she was the one whom Jesus had to correct. How can we avoid being so busy “working for the Lord” that we neglect other important matters (such as family)? On the other hand, think of a parable or biblical story in which those who neglect the Lord’s work are rebuked. How do we find the proper balance?

THE PRODIGAL SON AND THE ELDER BROTHER (Luke 15:29, 30).

One of the most moving sections in all Scripture is the story of the prodigal son. What a powerful representation of God's love for repentant sinners.

Yet there's also another message found there; it comes from the words and attitude of the elder brother, who is determined to squash the joyous celebration of his younger brother's return. Confronting his father, the older brother lets loose with a list of complaints (Luke 15:29, 30, RSV):

"Lo, these many years I have served you"—the argument of length of service.

"I never disobeyed your command"—the argument of obeyed orders.

"Yet you never gave me a kid"—the argument of unequal remuneration.

"But when this son of yours came [note he does not refer to him as his brother], who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!"—the argument of not only did I not get equal remuneration, but the scoundrel who deserved to get less instead got more.

From a human perspective, the brother had many valid complaints. What the father did was not, in a sense, fair. Yet this is precisely what the gospel is about, that of God not being "fair." After all, a person suffering for the misdeeds of another is hardly what one would call fair. And yet that is exactly what Christ did—suffer for the sin of others. We should be thankful; for because if God were "fair" and gave us what we deserved, what would be our fate?

The complaints of the elder brother were natural, if not right. How easy it is to throw in the faces of sinners their sins. Those who have erred often (but not always) need pity, help, sympathy—not stern rebuke. If ever there were a time to reflect the character of Christ, it is in showing mercy to those who have fallen short because we all have fallen short ourselves.

Anders has sinned grievously against his wife, his children, his church, and His Lord. Though he showed true repentance for his sin and was forgiven by all involved, when told that he could not retain his previous church position, he bitterly complained that the forgiveness given him was not true forgiveness. Explain how a person can be truly forgiven and yet still bear certain consequences of his or her sin.

FURTHER STUDY: Other Contentious Pairs (study in context the scriptural references below).

Additional siblings in contention:

	Circumstances	Outcome
Rachel and Leah (Gen. 30:15)	_____	_____
Er and Onan (Gen. 38:3-10)	_____	_____
Jotham and Abimelech (Judg. 9:21)	_____	_____
Ammon, Tamar, and Absalom (2 Sam. 13:14, 15, 32)	_____	_____

We have studied genetic siblings. By spiritualizing the relationship, Jesus enlarges the definition of brother and sister to include more than blood relatives:

“And he [Jesus] replied, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother’” (Mark 3:33-35, RSV).

“If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:15, 16, RSV).

Discussion Question:

In how many of the relationships studied this week were the contentions settled according to Jesus’ command? “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:15-17, RSV).

SUMMARY: Family quarrels seldom impact just the two people in contention. The negative outcomes ripple out, impacting numerous other lives, sometimes for generations.



Transformed Lives

Cristita Bandalan Garnado

My father was much feared in our mountain village in the Philippines. Nobody dared cross him. A datu (chief) and a fierce headhunter, he often joined in bloody tribal conflicts with other Manobo villages. I remember my father hiding by the window in our hut and shooting passersby with his bow and arrows. When he hit one, he would laugh with pleasure as the victim crawled away in pain. To my father, this was a game. His family did not escape his heartless ways. We children trembled when he roared at us like a lion.

Then student missionaries from Mountain View College came to our village to open a school and teach the children to read and write. My father was not interested in the school or the missionaries, but other villagers were glad for a school to teach their children.

Eagerly the villagers worked to build the schoolhouse. Women and children gathered grass for the roof, and the men cut wood for the walls. It took us just a week to finish our school.

Our new teachers did not smoke like most lowlanders, and they loved to sing. They made school fun, and we learned many things. I was so shy that I hid in the corner of the school room during classes, but I listened attentively to the lessons and Bible stories they told. I admired the teachers for their good example and kindness to us. Secretly I dreamed of becoming a teacher one day.

When my brothers and sisters and I wanted to be baptized, we had to ask our father. To our surprise, he did not object.

My father objected when I wanted to go away to high school, but my mother persuaded him to let me go. On my visits home I began to sense changes in my father. He seemed gentler, and his prejudice against the missionaries was fading. At my graduation he stood proudly beside me, and on the way home he told me he wanted to be baptized. What a miracle God has performed to transform him from a fierce headhunter to a follower of gentle Jesus!

I enrolled at Mountain View College, where our school's missionary teachers had attended. I studied hard while there and graduated with a degree in education. I have dedicated my life to teach my own people about the transforming love of Christ. Today I am a missionary teacher in another Manobo village that is just now hearing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Cristita Bandalan Garnado and her husband teach in a Manobo mission school in the mountains of southern Philippines.

Produced by the Office of Mission
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Children Showcased



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Prov. 22:6; plus, as time permits, read the daily Bible texts in context.

MEMORY TEXT: “Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right” (Proverbs 20:11).

KEY THOUGHT: Biblical history testifies to the impact children can exert, for good or evil. In turn, the influence that adults have on impressionable young minds makes all the difference in determining what kind of adults children become. How crucial, then, that children be given the right training.

JESUS IDENTIFIED WITH CHILDREN. Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus was born a dependent infant. His earthly parents honored Heaven's trust in them; Joseph and Mary provided an environment for Jesus to flourish. “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52, RSV). As an adult, Jesus constantly ministered to the needs of children. Once a child Himself, He knew what children experienced and was therefore able to relate to the young ones brought to Him.

Such is the kingdom of heaven. When the Hebrew mothers brought their babes to be blessed by Christ, the disciples tried to send them away. But Jesus, checking His disciples, said, “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). Something about children made them examples of what's needed to be in the kingdom of heaven. Thus, this week we learn from children what, perhaps, adults could never teach us.

SAMUEL AND ELI'S SONS: A STUDY IN CONTRAST (1 Sam. 2:26; 2:12).

One of the most enlightening parts of this story is the contrast between the character of Samuel, son of Hannah, and the characters of Phinehas and Hophni, the sons of Eli (Eli was a leader in Israel).

“And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men” (1 Sam. 2:26). “Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:12, NKJV).

What was the sin of Eli's two sons? See 1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22.

Eli's sons used their office as priests to indulge their lusts and passions. Though Scripture records Eli rebuking them (1 Sam. 2:22-25), his disciplinary measures came way too late (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 575-579). The Lord warned Eli that a great punishment would come upon him and his house because of his sons. In fact, the first prophecy given to young Samuel occurred when the Lord told him that He would “perform against Eli all I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end” (1 Sam. 3:12, NKJV).

What does the fact that the Lord punished Eli for the sins of his children say about how seriously the Lord takes parental responsibility?

Are wayward children always the fault of bad parenting? Explain whichever answer you give with reasons why.

Hannah worked very hard to give young Samuel good training; she succeeded where Eli obviously failed (we're told nothing about Eli's wife). Scripture gives a hint about what might have been one of Eli's mistakes. After Eli had been told that the Philistines took the ark of the covenant and killed his two sons, Scripture says that at the “mention of the ark of God” (1 Sam. 4:18), Eli keeled over and died. In other words—he seemed to show more concern about the ark than the death of his own sons! Though God needs to come first, even before family, could Eli have been too busy serving God that he neglected his own sons?

Samuel grew up to be a great man of God. Yet he also didn't do too well with his children (see 1 Sam. 8:1-3). What lessons can parents learn from these unfortunate stories?

DAVID: APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING (1 Sam. 17:49).

No matter how often the story of David and Goliath is told to children, there's an adult lesson there, not just about faith but about prejudging those whom we might deem unsuitable for certain tasks.

What were the objections that these people gave about David's plans to battle Goliath?

His eldest brother Eliab: 1 Sam. 17:28 _____

King Saul: 1 Sam. 17:33 _____

Goliath: 1 Sam. 17:42-44 _____

On the surface, the objections didn't seem totally unreasonable. The problem, however, was that when we deal with issues of faith and God, we shouldn't be limited by reason alone. Reason would have said that David was unsuitable to take on such a task. Yet the God we serve is a God whose wisdom, might, and power extend far beyond the limits of human reason. Thus, we shouldn't be surprised when through Him people are able to perform tasks that reason would say are impossible.

What other examples in Scripture tell of someone who accomplished great things, despite his or her youth and supposed inexperience?

The year was 1762, and a boy had just turned five. That morning he received his first violin. When the father's friends came over to play their violins together, the child wanted to join in. "No, son," said his father, "you cannot possibly play with us until you at least have had some lessons." Tearfully, the child left but was called back after one of the friends, Mr. Schachtner, persuaded the father to let the child play. "OK," said the father, "just play softly so no one hears you." After a few minutes all the violins were silenced, except the child's; everyone listened in astonishment. How could this child—with no lessons or experience!—play such complicated music so beautifully? Mr. Mozart was, indeed, shocked at young Wolfgang's musical ability. Thus, even with secular things, we need to be careful about prejudging youth and inexperience.

Consider Ellen White: sickly, a girl, little education, and barely out of her teens! Yet called to the prophetic ministry. In what ways does her experience parallel what David experienced with Goliath?

THE CHILDREN AND THE BEARS (2 Kings 2:23, 24).

“He [Elisha] went up from there to Bethel; and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, ‘Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!’” (2 Kings 2:23, RSV).

Elisha had dedicated his life to the spiritual needs of his nation. Yet, as he was entering upon this mission, a number of youth came out of Bethel to mock him. Their words about him going “up” showed that they knew something of the ascension of Elijah, a solemn and sacred event (it’s not every day someone is translated without seeing death!). With Elijah gone, they turned their taunts to Elisha, derisively calling upon him also to make his ascent.

Their behavior can be traced to two sources:

The devil. “The young men were inspired by Satan, who was seeking to do what he could to counteract the effect of the solemn event that had occurred and that could not but leave a deep impression upon the people of the land.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 856.

The parents. “Elijah had been translated to heaven, and his mantle had fallen upon Elisha. Then wicked youth, who had learned from their parents to despise the man of God, followed Elisha, and mockingly cried, ‘Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.’”—*Early Writings*, pp. 247, 248.

How did Elisha respond to their taunts? Did he pray for them? Did he turn his cheek? Did he try encouraging them to repent? 2 Kings 2:24.

“The awful judgment that came upon them was of God. After this, Elisha had no further trouble in his mission. For fifty years he passed in and out of the gate of Bethel, and went to and fro from city to city, passing through crowds of the worst and rudest of idle, dissolute youth, but no one ever mocked him or made light of his qualifications as the prophet of the Most High. This one instance of terrible severity in the commencement of his career was sufficient to command respect through his whole life.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 44.

However harsh their judgment might seem, however much about their tragic fate we still might not understand, this story can serve as a powerful warning against those who scorn holiness or who mock those called of God. In what ways can we, even today, be guilty of the same sin?

THE LITTLE MAID: SHE WITNESSES (2 Kings 5:2-4).

Naaman, a great military leader, is afflicted with a loathsome disease for which he can find no cure. Along comes a "little maid," a child taken captive by his victorious armies, who knows where he can get help. "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:3, NKJV). Look at the incredible confidence this child displayed in the power of her God, even after she had been taken away as a captive by the invading Syrians, a calamity that could have easily caused her to doubt the power, and even the existence, of the God she served.

Were risks involved in the "little maid's" advice? Suppose after humbling himself to where he sought help from a "foreign" God, he weren't healed? How might Naaman have responded?

Not only did the Little Maid witness to Naaman and his cohorts, but she remains a symbol today of those who keep faithful and positive in spite of extreme adversity:

"A marauding band from Syria had swooped down upon her helpless nation, and she, through no fault of her own, had been one of the victims. She had been carried away into a strange land. Thus she had been robbed in a single day of her home, of her father and mother, of her brothers and sisters, of every outward possession that heretofore had enriched her life. And to crown all, she had been robbed of her freedom. . . . But though she had been robbed of every outward possession, there were some treasures to which she still clung. There are values, thank God, that physical force and violence cannot touch. Life can do harsh and horrible things to us. . . . But she also knew through her experience another and a finer fact; she knew that there are treasures of which no force however great and however cruel can rob us." —Covis G. Chappell, *Feminine Faces* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1974), pp. 91, 92. See also *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 244-250.

Somehow, even amid adversity, this child, not even named in Scripture, adhered to the faith she had been raised on. Though little detail is given, what factors could have played a role in shaping her so that, despite outward circumstances, she not only kept her faith but witnessed in a powerful way for that faith? What are we doing so that our children could do the same? Could we do the same?

JOSIAH—HE RULES (2 Kings 22:1, 2).

“Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him” (2 Kings 23:25, RSV).

Though Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign, the Hebrew nation never had a king quite like him. Almost the whole account of his 31-year rule, as depicted in 2 Kings, deals with his attempt to eradicate pagan influence and restore the true worship of God. Second Kings 23:3 states that the king made a covenant with the Lord to “keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes.”

What does the people’s reaction to Josiah’s pledge (vs. 3) teach about the great influence that leaders have on the spirituality of those they lead?

Even a quick read in 2 Kings 23 about the reforms Josiah instituted can be sobering. Look at the pagan customs that had so infiltrated the nation, at every level! There were articles for the worship of pagan gods in the temple itself (vs. 4); there were priests who burned incense to pagan gods, including the sun and moon and stars (vs. 5). How could the chosen nation, with such clear warnings, have fallen into such blatant apostasy? Do you think this apostasy happened all at once, or slowly? Can you see this same happening in our church today? And are we just as blind to it?

According to 1 Kings 22, the “book of the law” inspired Josiah to institute radical change. When the book of the law was first read to him, Josiah “tore his clothes” (vs. 11). Obviously, what the Lord had commanded in the book of the law was not, he saw, being practiced by the people, and therefore calamity awaited. Thus, using the Word of God as his basis, he instituted radical reforms through the whole nation. No doubt, many people, particularly those who were accustomed to pagan worship, did not like what was happening. Yet, that opposition didn’t stop Josiah from doing what was right, no matter the outcome.

In the end, Josiah’s reforms failed to avert catastrophe. He was even told beforehand that they wouldn’t (2 Kings 22:18-20). Nevertheless, this reality didn’t stop him from initiating reform. What lessons can we learn about obeying God, whatever the outcome?

FURTHER STUDY: Read the following familiar passage:

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 18:1-4, RSV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus didn't say that it is a “good idea” to become like little children. He said that we *must* become like them, or we can never enter the kingdom of God. Those are strong words. What was He talking about? Why is it so crucial for us, then, to become like children?
2. All analogies, or comparisons, break down at some point. In what ways might the admonition to be like a child not be advisable? Could, in fact, some of the aspects of being a child that are laudable become problems if taken too far? What characteristics of children would, in fact, be dangerous for a Christian to manifest?
3. Looking at the children in this week's lesson, do you think they were impacted more by hereditary or environmental influences? Of course, nothing can be done about heredity and, as often in the case of children—little, if anything, can be done about environment. As adults, environment can be controlled, at least to a degree. Discuss ways in which adults can seek to give children the best spiritual environment possible.
4. Because it's an established principle that we are heavily influenced by what we hear, see, and read, how crucial is it that parents do their best to monitor the sources influencing their children? What practical steps can parents take to ensure that their children are not being filled with things that will make spiritual growth difficult, especially when these children reach the age of accountability and have to make their own spiritual choices?

SUMMARY: Parents can take their children from the cradle to the Cross, but no further. At the Cross, each individual has to make his or her own choice. This week's lesson shows the power of parents in creating influences that can impact what, finally, must always be a personal decision.



I'm Going Back! Part 1

Charlotte Ishkanian

Tania was starting her first assignment as a missionary nurse. She would help reopen a mission hospital and train midwives and health care workers.

A pastor and his wife also had been assigned to serve in the area, where most of the people are Adventists. The only pastor serving the area was old and lacked transportation to visit all the churches.

Tania surveyed the mission. Except for the church, the mission lay in ruins. One home had been made liveable for the missionaries.

People had heard that a nurse was coming and were waiting for treatment. Tania began treating malaria, tropical sores, and diarrhea with the few supplies she had. There was so much to do, and every night she fell into bed exhausted but satisfied.

One night she awoke to the sound of breaking glass. Someone was breaking their windows! The pastor took his flashlight and went to the door to see what he could do. "We want you!" some men shouted. Instinctively Tania knew that this was not a medical emergency. Frightened, she stumbled in the dark toward the pastor's room.

The mob beat down the door, and when the pastor tried to calm the angry men, they began beating him. The women cowered in the bedroom praying and crying as the pastor suffered blow after blow. Some men ran into the bedroom and began hitting Tania and the pastor's wife. Would they kill them—or worse? Tania could do nothing but pray. The mob tore up the rooms looking for valuables. One man accused the missionaries of being government spies.

When the invaders finally left, Tania and the pastor's wife lay still, listening for sounds. They could hear the pastor's groans as he stumbled toward the bedroom. He had been severely beaten, but in the darkness there was little they could do. Together they waited for the dawn.

As dawn lighted the sky, Tania treated the pastor's injuries. He needed a doctor, but the mission was 13 hours by car from the nearest city. They had no way to contact the outside world, and the pastor needed help. But Tania did not want to leave. She had been there only 10 days, but she had seen the immense needs of the people. "There's so much to do here," she said. "We can't quit!"

The missionaries heard someone outside. It was the old pastor. He had heard the mob's shouts and had tried to come and help them, but the mob would not let him through. He feared that they had been killed.

(continued next week)

Tania Batista is studying at Newbold College and plans to return to the mission field. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School-Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference
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The Personal Factor



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Eccles. 4:10; Matt. 9:37; Matt. 10:7, 8; Matt. 11:4; 2 Cor. 1:11.

MEMORY TEXT: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace” (Isaiah 52:7).

KEY THOUGHT: Too often Christians prefer the easy way of sharing: throw out some tracts, donate money to buy a mission launch, give a quick witness on a bus or airplane, whatever. And then they feel so good about themselves for having done the Lord's work.

But to go out and physically bring people to Jesus, to cut deep into personal time, to take away from the things they want to do for themselves, and to use that time to lead a soul to Christ—that's not often so attractive a choice.

THE HARD WORK OF EVANGELISM. A German immigrant working near Otsego, Michigan, went into town one Saturday to get his hair cut. To his astonishment, the only barbershop in town was closed, the sign stating plainly, “Open Monday-Friday.” So when he returned, he asked—with a heavy German brogue he never lost—why the shop was closed on the busiest day of the week. “I'm a Seventh-day Adventist—and a German immigrant too” was the unexpected answer.

Now, the barber could have handed the man a leaflet as he left the shop, or he could have mentioned some meetings that were coming to town and invited him to attend. But he witnessed by the most effective technique—he invited the man home for dinner. He gave of himself, his time, his energy. A friendship ensued, and the man was eventually baptized.

That's true witnessing!

HE DESCENDED THROUGH THE ROOF (Mark 2:1-12).

“And when they could not get near him [Jesus] because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay” (Mark 2:4, RSV).

According to Mark, there were four men who, knowing that Jesus was in the house, brought the paralytic to Him. Yet almost nothing has been revealed about these men. Who were they? In what way were they related to the paralytic? Family? Friends? Yet so determined were they to get help, not for themselves, but for the discouraged paralytic (see *The Desire of Ages*, p. 267), that they climbed onto the roof of the house, broke through it, and then dropped the man down at the feet of Jesus.

Talk about friends! Talk about the personal factor! Talk about a desire to bring someone to Jesus. Imagine if all who believed in Christ were that determined to bring everyone to Him.

Notice what Mark says in verse 5. “When Jesus saw *their* faith” (emphasis supplied). Jesus was impressed by the faith of those four unnamed men. In response, He said to the paralytic, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” Analyze what’s going on here. According to the text itself, it was the faith of these men as well (not just the sick one) that promoted Jesus to move in behalf of the paralytic. What does this incident teach us about the role we have in making God real to others?

“At his suggestion his friends bore him to the top of the house and, breaking up the roof, let him down at the feet of Jesus. The discourse was interrupted. The Saviour looked upon the mournful countenance, and saw the pleading eyes fixed upon Him. He understood the case; He had drawn to Himself that perplexed and doubting spirit. While the paralytic was yet at home, the Saviour had brought conviction to his conscience. . . . Jesus had watched the first glimmer of faith grow into a belief that He was the sinner’s only helper, and had seen it grow stronger with every effort to come into His presence.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 268.

In this incident three factors are at work: the friends, who bring the person to Jesus; the paralytic, who was open to Christ; and Christ, who alone does the saving and the healing. In what ways does the story exemplify the work of evangelism?

THE BETHESDA CRIPPLE (John 5:2-18).

“Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years” (John 5:2, 3, 5).

Hard to imagine, 38 years with a debilitating disease— and yet no one to help him into the water! The fact that he would be left, trampled by others wanting to get there first, says so much about sinful, selfish humanity. Here is one man who could have used the four friends that the paralytic had in Mark 2. In this case, however, when there was no one to help him, Jesus Himself, the Great Physician, came along instead.

The cripple didn't have anyone to bring Him to Jesus; so Jesus came to him. Does this fact in any way lessen our responsibility in the work of evangelism? If we fail to do our part, do we have any assurance that the Lord will seek people out Himself, without us? Explain your answer.

After healing the man, Jesus told him to “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk” (vs. 8), even though it was the Sabbath day. When the leaders saw him carrying his bed, they accused him of breaking the law. “It is the sabbath day,” they said, “it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.” (vs. 10). Rather than be amazed about him being healed, or even happy for him who had been sick for so long, they were more concerned about “the law.” Though Scripture doesn't say, it certainly would be easy to imagine those who had accused him of violating the Sabbath as being the same ones who would ignore him and let him lay there, without trying to bring him to the water.

How easy it is for us to be concerned with the forms of religion while ignoring the most important things.

In what ways is it possible for us, as Seventh-day Adventists, to act like those who accused the man of violating the law? We should each look at our lives and ask ourselves In what ways are we facilitators, working to help souls find or better know Christ; and in what ways are we like those who are so involved with sticking to the law that we, in fact, use the law to hinder a person's understanding of Christ and what Christ has done for him or her?

THE PERSONAL FACTOR—COUSIN, BROTHER, FRIEND (John 1).

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29b, RSV).

Newly introduced to Jesus, His earliest followers could not be constrained. . . . We have found the Messiah! . . . We have found the Messiah! . . . We have found the Messiah!

Fill in the blanks, noting the rapid transfer of the good news from person to person:

“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at _____ as he walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’” (vss. 35, 36). Then _____, one of the two, searched out his brother _____ and told him (vs. 41). “The next day Jesus . . . found _____ (vs. 43). Next, Philip found _____ and said to him, “ ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’” (vs. 45).

Not everyone in the time of Christ reacted so positively to Him. The same miracles that converted some people turned others even harder against Christ (see John 11). What causes people to have such divergent reactions to the same message?

This account of those who first accepted Christ shows how important personal witnessing is. Many of those who had met Jesus immediately told others about Him.

In fact, when Christ was here on earth, people could meet Him in the flesh. Since then, the vast majority of souls who have come to know Christ have not seen Him personally, as did the disciples. Instead, they have come to Him through the power of the Spirit and the Word of God. Yet even in many of these cases, it was the work of personal witnessing that first introduced these souls to Christ. Those who want to know about Jesus have to be told about Him, and Christians have been given the commission to do just that.

A young man found Christ and the Adventist message through the personal witness of a man who, two years later, abandoned Christianity and became an active atheist. What does a story like this tell us about the limits of personal witnessing? In other words, however important the personal factor is, at what point does its crucial role end, if ever?

THE DEMON CHILD (Mark 9:17-29).

“Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.’

“Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’” (Mark 9:23, 24, NKJV).

What an incredible cry, full of irony, even paradox: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.” In other words, “I believe, sort of, but help me believe and trust more than I do.”

To whom did the father first go for help? See Mark 9:18.

Note to whom Jesus' response of "O faithless generation" was probably directed: "It does not seem likely that Jesus had the father of the demon-possessed boy in mind as He spoke these words, for the father's faith was not the only obstacle in the way of the healing of his son. Because the disciples themselves were primarily at fault (see on Mark 9:29), it would almost seem that the Saviour had them in mind particularly."—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 633.

Answered and unanswered prayer. This story can cause perplexity if not understood in the context of all Scripture. How many faithful Christians have had prayers for healing (including the apostle Paul [2 Cor. 12]) and others requests not answered as they had hoped? The logical question, in the context of this account alone, would be, “Is it somehow my fault, for not having enough faith?”

Jesus said that “All things are *possible* to him who believes,” (Mark 9:23, RSV, emphasis supplied), not that “all things are *guaranteed* to him who believes.” That’s a big difference. He’s talking about potential, not guaranteed actuality. Though Scripture talks about the importance of belief, belief doesn’t guarantee that prayer will always be answered as we want. In this case, though the immediate context is the demon-possessed child, Jesus seems to be dealing with the broader issue of faith and commitment as a whole; what He’s not promising is that if you have enough faith all your prayers will always be answered as you wish.

A praying, Christian family lost a small child to a disease, even after much prayer and tears were offered in her behalf. How can you help them, especially the parents, not to blame themselves for the death because of lack of faith?

MISGUIDED FACILITATORS (Matt. 9:37, 38).

The command is obvious, but the laborers who respond do not always work with the most effective strategies or with the highest integrity, tact, or sensitivity.

Christian history, sadly, shows just how real the problem is. One twentieth-century Jewish writer, talking about church persecution of Jews (often in the context of trying to convert them to Christ) said, "Wouldn't it be something if Jesus did turn out to be the Messiah, but you Christians have kept us from him!"

The Bible itself also has various examples of personal witnessing that have not been very effective.

What group was discriminated against in Mark 10:13?

Note Jesus' reaction: "'Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God.' . . . And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them" (Mark 10:14, 16, RSV).

What impassioned request did the Canaanite woman ask of Jesus in Matthew 15:22?

Note the disciples' reaction: "And his disciples came and begged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she is crying after us.'" In spite of the disciples' request, "Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly" (vss. 23b, 28, RSV).

Driven desperate by his hopeless condition, the blind beggar Bartimaeus squatted by the road. When he sensed that Jesus was near, what did he cry out? (see Mark 10:47).

Again, those who should have been helping, hindered instead. He who most needed Jesus was told to shut up: "And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' And Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him'" (vss. 48, 49b, RSV). Once again, Jesus overrides those who were supposed to be helping Him.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, called to be personal witnesses for Christ, do we sometimes, unwittingly, get in the way of Christ, as did some of those in today's lesson?

FURTHER STUDY: The War Against Powerful Personal Witnessing. Study the following passages to glean reasons why the powers of darkness do all they can to thwart effective personal witnessing.

Reason one: Anyone brought to Jesus was healed both physically and spiritually; consequently, Satan did whatever necessary to keep people away: “And he [Jesus] answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them’” (Luke 7:22, RSV).

Reason two: Those brought to Jesus not only were healed, but they learned about Jesus and consequently about God: “I bear witness to myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness to me” (John 8:18, RSV).

Reason three: Review the story of the cleansed leper as told in Mark 1:40-45. As this incident illustrates, it is impossible to be quiet about what Jesus has done for us. Even though Jesus had instructed the healed man to tell no one, “he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news” (vs. 45b, RSV).

In Thursday’s lesson we studied misguided witnesses who prevented people from accessing Jesus. There is, however, an even more evil category—those who brought people to Jesus for malicious motives.

Example one: Review the story of Judas’ betrayal in Mark 14:43-46. “Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him and lead him away safely’” (vs. 44, RSV).

Example two: Reread the story of the woman taken in adultery as told in John 8:1-11: “Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him [Jesus], that they might have to accuse him” (vss. 5, 6a). These religious leaders brought someone to Jesus alright, but for what heinous intent.

SUMMARY: Christians have been given the greatest privilege ever given to mortals: that of cooperating with Christ in bringing souls to salvation. How crucial it is that they take this job seriously. Even more importantly, how crucial that they not stand in the way.



I'm Going Back! Part 2

Charlotte Ishkanian

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Tania Batista, a nurse, cowered with the pastor and his wife in their home following a nighttime attack by a mob. The pastor had been severely beaten and needed a doctor.

The elderly pastor who lived in the area sent a church member by motorcycle 120 miles to the nearest city. Another church member rode his bicycle 60 miles to another outpost.

As the sun set that Friday evening, several church members arrived to protect the three missionaries that night. Sabbath morning found hundreds of believers sitting outside the house. They had heard that their new pastor could not attend church, so they had come to pray and sing and study with him.

A few days later the three workers were evacuated. It was six months before Tania and a doctor could return to the mission to train health care workers and midwives and to treat up to 200 patients a day.

Then guerrilla soldiers attacked a neighboring village. Tania and the doctor were warned to leave immediately. Church members hid them in their village for protection, while other believers guarded the mission hospital. The next day survivors of the attack came for help. Some needed immediate hospital care. As Tania and the doctor prepared to evacuate them, Tania knew that they would not be able to return.

Tania's heart was torn. She longed to return and complete the midwife training program, but it was months before the area was safe enough to return. This time she returned alone and for six weeks only. She still had no electricity, and often she awoke at night hearing noises. But from sunrise to sunset she worked for the people.

The UN troops did not allow her to leave the mission grounds, so she prayed that God would bring the midwives to her. And they came. As she taught them and cared for the sick, she thought of the good she could do if she could remain. But when her six weeks ended, she had to leave. As her car drove out of the mission, the midwives she had trained walked along beside it, bidding her a tearful farewell.



Tania is determined to return to Africa as a missionary nurse. It is what she has always wanted to do.

Tania Batista (left) is preparing to return to the mission field. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

Powerful Prayers



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Kings 20:1-21; Exod. 32:3-35; Dan. 9:1-19; Psalm 51; Acts 12:1-17.

MEMORY TEXT: "You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to many prayers" (2 Corinthians 1:11, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: However difficult it is for sinful humans to understand all the principles of prayer, we are nevertheless admonished in Scripture to pray and pray—and pray. Passionately and frequently, faithful men and women did indeed pray—for healing, for intercession, for liberation, for forgiveness, for prison release. And the Lord, in His wisdom and timing, answered according to His will, as He does today.

SUCCESS TIP! A group of success-oriented professionals invited a well-known Adventist minister to speak on strategies for living the Christian life. "Don't give us any of that read-the-Bible-and-pray stuff," a participant said. "Give us some practical suggestions instead." The preacher replied, "Sorry. Those are the only tips I have. There are no other successful ones."

How crucial for us to realize that earnest, persevering prayer is our source of power for the Christian life. Without that, we have nothing. Supplication to God—offered by a soul understanding his or her own helplessness and need for entire dependence upon Him—can alone bring to men and women the power of the Holy Spirit, their only adequate source of strength in the daily battle against self, sin, and the principalities and powers in high places. To fight against these things alone, without prayer leading us to the power of God, is like trying to shoot down a missile with a slingshot.

AND HEZEKIAH PRAYED—“EXTEND MY LIFE!” (2 Kings 20:1-21).

“And it came about before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of your father David, ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you’ ” ’ ” (2 Kings 20:4, 5a, NASB).

Hezekiah came to the throne determined to do all in his power to save Judah from the terrible fate overtaking the northern kingdom because of its apostasy. He quickly instituted needed reforms in the southern kingdom, beginning with a restoration of the long-neglected temple services. However, as so often happens for reasons we so often don’t understand, illness struck. “In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death” (2 Kings 20:1a, RSV). In fact, he was given a message from the Lord that he would die.

Though told by God Himself that “you shall die” (2 Kings 20:1), Hezekiah prayed anyway that he would be healed. Was it presumptuous on his part to ask God to change His mind about something He had already declared? What does this incident tell us about the power of prayer?

Second Kings 20 tells not only of Hezekiah’s miraculous recovery but of the incident with the Babylonian ambassadors. These men, bearing a gift to Hezekiah, came on a diplomatic visit. At one point, full of “pride and vanity” (Prophets and Kings, p. 344), Hezekiah showed them “all the house of his treasures. . . . There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them” (vs. 13, NKJV). This act—which Scripture says happened because “his heart was lifted up” (2 Chron. 32:25)—resulted in God’s warning of a future calamity that would fall upon the nation. How ironic that Hezekiah, given this miraculous reprieve by God, would use his extra time to make such a calamitous blunder.

God answered Hezekiah’s prayer in a miraculous way. Yet how soon Hezekiah forgot just how dependent upon God He was. Though most of us might not have had such a miraculous experience as Hezekiah, we are all just as dependent upon God, even if we are just as prone to forget. What practical things can we do to help us never to lose sight of this dependence, thus avoiding, in our own ways, Hezekiah’s mistake?

AND MOSES PRAYED—“SAVE MY PEOPLE!” (Exod. 32:7-35).

“‘But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written’” (Exod. 32:32, RSV).

The original Hebrew in this verse yields a wonderful truth regarding salvation. The word translated “forgive” comes from a common Hebrew word in the Bible (*nasa*) that means “to bear” or “to carry.” In fact, Isaiah, talking specifically about Christ’s death on the cross, twice uses a form of that same word: “Surely he has borne (from *nasa*) our griefs . . . and he bare (from *nasa*) the sin of many” (Isa. 53:4, 12).

Thus, in this famous prayer of Moses, the prophet is saying to the Lord, “But now, if thou wilt *bear* (from *nasa*) their sin. . . .” Moses—understanding the plan of salvation, understanding the principle of the cross of Christ—*asked God Himself to bear the sins of His people*. Yes! Talk about clear depiction of the gospel! Here, many centuries before the Cross, even before the earthly sanctuary was built, we are given a powerful depiction of the principle of substitution, in which God Himself pays the penalty for the sins of His created beings. This is the foundation of the great hope all Christians have.

When, and how, was Moses’ prayer answered? When, and how, did God bear their sin? What Bible verses can you find to back up your response?

Many biblical commentators have viewed Moses in this particular role as a type of intercessor, similar to Christ in His role as Intercessor. (See Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25.) When Moses came down from the mountain, after interceding for Israel, his face was glowing: “That divine illumination symbolized the glory of the dispensation of which Moses was the visible mediator, a representative of the one true Intercessor.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 330.

Think about what it means that God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, bore the penalty of our sins! What does that act show us about the futility of trying to save ourselves?

If it were possible for us to save ourselves, would Christ have died in our stead? Why should this great truth of God, bearing our sins, be so humbling to us? Why should it cause us to change our lives and bring us into obedience?

AND DANIEL PRAYED—“RETURN THY PEOPLE!” (Dan. 9:1-19).

“‘And now, O Lord our God, who didst bring thy people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast made thee a name, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteous acts, let thy anger and thy wrath turn away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy hill; because for our sins . . . Jerusalem and thy people have become a byword among all who are round about us’” (Dan. 9:15, 16, RSV).

Health promoter, dream interpreter, lion tamer, astute statesman, brilliant writer, handwriting-code breaker—Daniel, first and foremost, was a man of prayer.

One of the most powerful and illuminating prayers in all Scripture is recorded in Daniel 9, when Daniel was interceding in behalf of his nation, which had been taken into captivity and whose holy temple was destroyed.

What first prompted Daniel to pray this prayer? See Dan 9:1, 2.

Besides being a man of prayer, Daniel was also a man of the Word of God. It was from his reading of Scripture that Daniel knew what to pray for, in this case the restoration of His people and the nation. Here is one simple example of the need for both prayer and the study of the Word. Each enhances the practice of the other.

Notice, too, the essence of Daniel’s prayer. Though Daniel himself is never recorded as having any moral lapses (unlike many other Bible characters), his prayer is constantly in the first person plural. In other words, all through the prayer he identifies himself with the sins of his nation, even though he was a great man of God and a prophet. “*We* have sinned. . . . *We* have not heeded your prophets. . . . *We* have rebelled. . . . *We* have not made our prayer before the Lord our God. . . . *We* have sinned against Him.”

Why did he pray this way? Perhaps Daniel simply so identified himself with his nation that he automatically linked their fate with his. Or more likely, Daniel understood the principle that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. He understood that all humans are guilty before God. This second option makes even more sense, considering that the 70-week prophecy concerning Jesus—who came as a cure for all humanity’s guilt—immediately followed his prayer of repentance.

It’s so easy to look at the faults of the church and point fingers of blame at this leader or that pastor or whomever. What does Daniel’s prayer teach us about our own guilt as well?

AND DAVID PRAYED—“FORGIVE MY GREAT SIN!” (Ps. 51).

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin”! (Ps. 51:1, 2, RSV).

Psalm 51, known as a penitential psalm, was composed by David after his great sin with Bathsheba, in which (among other things) he committed adultery and murder. It was written in anguish and self-abhorrence, brought upon Him by the power of the Holy Spirit upon a soul open to God’s leading.

“It is a prayer for forgiveness and for sanctification through the Holy Spirit. Accompanying the petition are vows of gratitude for God’s mercy and promises for the future. Perhaps no other OT passage draws so clear a picture of the truly repentant sinner trusting in God’s power to forgive and restore, as this portrait of David’s experience of transgression.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 755.

What verses in the psalm show David’s repentance? How is repentance related to forgiveness?

Though repentance contains no merit in and of itself, it’s about all we can bring to God—for it’s our acknowledgment that we, really, have *nothing* to bring to Him. In other words, there are no works we can do to save ourselves; all we can do is acknowledge our sins and seek forgiveness for them. That’s repentance. Without it, God can do nothing to save us, not because the penalty for our sins hasn’t already been paid but because repentance shows that we have realized our utter helplessness and need for God to save us. Repentance is, in many ways, sinners admitting their great need of God doing for them what they can never, in any way, do for themselves. True repentance expresses a person’s understanding of salvation by faith alone.

The first sin was not adultery, lust, or greed but self-exaltation and pride. It remains, today, one of the most dangerous sins, because, unlike many other sins, it is socially acceptable (people are disciplined in the church for adultery—not pride!). In the context of today’s lesson, why are pride and self-exaltation so dangerous? How likely is a proud person, full of self-righteousness, to have true repentance?

AND THE CHURCH PRAYED—“GET PETER OUT OF PRISON!” (Acts 12:1-17).

“So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church” (Acts 12:5, RSV).

According to Scripture, Peter’s supernatural deliverance from prison was a direct result of the church’s prayers. And if anyone did need prayer at that time, it was Peter.

First, the same Herod who locked up Peter had just killed James “with the sword” (Acts 12:2), so Peter’s future didn’t look too bright. Second, besides being locked in a dungeon, Peter was “bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison” (vs. 6, NKJV), so the chance of escape looked bleak. Third, Herod was holding him until the Passover ended, when he intended to “bring him before the people” (vs. 4), and that time was fast approaching (vs. 6).

Despite the gloomy situation, Acts depicts Peter in prison doing something quite interesting. What was it—what does it reveal about Peter’s faith?

Peter, trusting in the Lord for deliverance—didn’t expect it quite like this. Only after the angel brought him out of prison and he was in the street did he finally “come to himself,” realizing that what happened wasn’t a vision (vss. 9-11).

How interesting, too, that he seemed so astonished by this miracle. After all, here is a man who spent three and a half years with Jesus as one of His closest disciples. Peter had seen the dead raised, the blind given sight, the sick miraculously healed, the demon-possessed liberated, and so forth—miracles that, in many ways, were more incredible than what he had just experienced. And yet he was still astonished!

Peter, of course, wasn’t the only one astonished. Imagine the poor guards who, at some point, found their captive freed. As a result, these men were commanded to be put to death (vs. 19)—all as a result of God answering the prayers of His people.

How does one understand his or her unfortunate fate from a Christian perspective?

FURTHER STUDY: And Jesus Prayed—"God Save the World!"

Read this book: Roger J. Morneau, *Incredible Answers to Prayer* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assoc., 1990).

Jesus' most famous prayer is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13, KJV: "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Notice how simple this prayer is. What points stand out that help us understand the above principles of prayer—points that could help us in our own prayer life?
2. Prayer is in many ways one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith. We are told to pray; those who pray know that it works, and prayer has indeed brought about many wonderful results. Yet, what are some of the things about prayer that we don't understand? Discuss some of these questions, with the realization that—along with many secular things—we can engage in activities that we know are effective even if we don't always fully understand how.
3. What can we learn about prayer from this quote: "Christ was continually receiving from the Father that He might communicate to us. 'The word which ye hear,' He said, 'is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me.' John 14:24. 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' Matt. 20:28. Not for Himself, but for others, He lived and thought and prayed. From hours spent with God He came forth morning by morning, to bring the light of heaven to men. Daily He received a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit. In the early hours of the new day the Lord awakened Him from His slumbers, and His soul and His lips were anointed with grace, that He might impart to others."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 139.

SUMMARY: Whatever the mysteries of prayer, the Word of God is clear: Prayer works, and we should be doing more of it—both as a church and as individuals.



The Thief That Could Not Run

David L. Lin

Many Chinese Christians have little access to Christian books or even the Bible, but God honors their faith as they put into practice the teachings of Christ.

The peasant woman always locked her door when she left home. But one Sabbath she returned from worship and found her door wide open. She saw a man standing beside her rice bin with an empty cloth bag in his hand. She realized he must be a thief trying to steal her rice.

She could have called out to the neighbors for help, but when the thief did not move, she felt impressed to pray for him instead. She remembered that the Bible taught that Christians must love their enemies and pray for those who mistreat them. She knelt in the doorway of her home and prayed. "Lord," she said, "this man must be hungry, for he has come to get some of my rice. Please forgive him for breaking into my house and help him to find work so that he will not have to steal."

She rose from her knees and walked to where the man was standing. She spoke kindly to him, telling the would-be thief about Jesus, who would forgive his sins if he confessed them. Then she invited him to worship with her at church the following Sabbath. The man was so touched by her sermon and prayer that he agreed to go with her to worship God the following Sabbath. Then he told her why he did not run when she came to the door.

The would-be thief had filled his bag with rice from her rice bin and hoisted the bag onto his shoulder. He turned to leave, but his feet would not move. He thought that the rice bag was too heavy, so he poured some rice back into the bin. Again he tried to leave, but he could not move his feet. He poured more rice back, and still he could not take a step. Finally he poured all of the rice back into the bin, but his feet remained glued to the spot. He was still standing beside the rice bin when the woman came home from church and found him.

This woman who practiced the truth that she had learned from the Bible won him to Christ.



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Produced by the Office of Mission
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Martyrs and Their Murderers



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Chron. 24:17-22; Jer. 26:20-23; Matt. 14:1-11; Acts 7:54-8:2; John 21:18, 19.

MEMORY TEXT: “‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 5:10, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The Greek word for “martyr” comes from the same word also translated “witness.” Preferring death to dishonoring God makes a Christian martyr the ultimate witness, for he or she has made the ultimate sacrifice.

WHY STUDY MARTYRS? Skip the wax museum at Niagara Falls devoted to torture. Bypass the exhibit in Rothenburg, Germany, featuring medieval torture. Don’t bother to read Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*. Who needs such graphic reminders of our race’s penchant for evil?

“History,” said James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, “is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” Sadly, the inhumanity of human history is not a dream but a reality.

What advantage, then, can it be for us to study biblical martyrs? After all, Paul admonishes, “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3, RSV). Why not study love instead?

Because the scriptural references are there, that’s why. The record stretches from Genesis to Revelation, from the death of the righteous Abel (Gen. 4:8) to the harlot woman “drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev. 17:6b, RSV). If it’s in Scripture, there’s reason for it. This week we’ll see if we can find out why.

ZECHARIAH—STONED TO DEATH (2 Chron. 24:17-22).

“But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord” (2 Chron. 24:21, RSV).

The background to the story of Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada (not Zechariah the minor prophet) is tragically simple. King Joash, seven-years old when he came to the throne, was influenced for good by the priest Jehoiada. However, after Jehoiada died, the king was turned in the wrong direction by the princes of Judah. “Now after the death of Jehoiada the princes of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king hearkened to them. And they [the princes] forsook the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their guilt” (vss. 17, 18, RSV).

These wicked princes came and “did obeisance” to the king, as if they were to learn and be subject to him. Yet who ultimately ended up listening to whom? What’s the lesson there?

As always, the Lord did not sit by while His people destroyed themselves. “He sent prophets to them, to bring them back to the Lord; and they testified against them, but they would not listen” (vs. 19, NRSV). Eventually Zechariah, “the son of Jehoiada the priest” (vs. 20), was sent with a message that called them back to the commands that the Lord had given them. In verse 20, Zechariah says that their disobedience was making it impossible for the Lord to prosper them. “Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper?” (RSV).

In other words, at the heart of the prophet’s message is the same message given time and again by God to His people, which is to obey and thus live and prosper in Me. Yet, time and again, God’s people, showing lack of faith, don’t listen, thinking they can do it better on their own. How tragic the consequences have been and, in fact, will always be when God’s professed people take that course.

Perhaps the most frightening aspect of this story is that it was a people truly called out by God who, refusing to listen to the prophet, ordered his death. What lessons can we, also as a church called out by God, learn from this story?

What are the ways in which we today can, in a sense, “stone the prophet”?

URIAH—KILLED WITH A SWORD (Jer. 26).

“There was another man who prophesied in the name of the Lord, Uriah. . . . And when King Jehoiakim . . . heard his words, the king sought to put him to death. . . . Then . . . certain men . . . fetched Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who slew him with the sword and cast his dead body into the burial place of the common people” (Jer. 26:20-23b, RSV).

Though little is said about Uriah (not Bathsheba’s husband), his death needs to be studied in the context of Jeremiah’s ministry. Before Uriah is even mentioned, the chapter deals with Jeremiah’s message to Judah about repentance and obedience. However, the message didn’t ring well with the priests and the prophets, who said “to the princes and to all the people, ‘This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears’” (vs. 11, RSV).

What significance is there that it was the “priests and the prophets” who were speaking against Jeremiah? What other examples in Scripture show those who are supposed to be servants of the Lord working against Him?

Jeremiah then launches into an impassioned argument for his case.

Point one: The Lord is the One who sent me (vs. 12).

Point two: If you mend your ways, the Lord “ ‘will repent of the evil which he has pronounced against you’ ” (vs. 13, RSV).

Point three: “ ‘But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you’ ” (vs. 14, RSV).

Point four: But one thing is certain: If you kill me, “ ‘you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants.’ ” It was God who sent me (vs. 15, RSV).

Evidently, Jeremiah’s persuasion prevailed, because the vote was not to put him to death; however, these men still hadn’t changed their evil ways. Indeed, Uriah “prophesied against this city and against this land in words like those of Jeremiah” (vs. 21, RSV), for which he was killed.

Jeremiah was spared, Uriah wasn’t; yet Scripture gives no explanation, or excuses, justifying this outcome. How often do things happen in our lives in which we get no explanation or justification?

How can this story help us learn to trust God even when given no explanation or justification for tragedy?

JOHN THE BAPTIST—BEHEADED (Matt. 14:1-11).

“At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus; and he said to his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist, he has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him.’ For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison, for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; because John said to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her’ ” (Matt. 14:1-4, RSV).

Consider the situation of John the Baptist. Here was a man speaking for God, a man clearly moved by the Holy Spirit. Even before John’s birth, the Lord had marked him for a special ministry. “For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). Look at what Jesus said about him: “For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist” (Luke 7:28).

And, yet, not only was he taken prisoner by a wicked king—*he was then put to death due to the anger and lusts of a depraved woman and her daughter.* Hardly the most noble reason to die. Hardly something that would instill faith in those who believed that John was serving the Lord.

“Jesus did not interpose to deliver His servant. He knew that John would bear the test. Gladly would the Saviour have come to John, to brighten the dungeon gloom with His own presence. But He was not to place Himself in the hands of enemies and imperil His own mission. Gladly would He have delivered His faithful servant. But for the sake of thousands who in after years must pass from prison to death, John was to drink the cup of martyrdom. As the followers of Jesus should languish in lonely cells, or perish by the sword, the rack, or the fagot, . . . what a stay to their hearts would be the thought that John the Baptist, to whose faithfulness Christ Himself had borne witness, had passed through a similar experience!”
—The Desire of Ages, p. 224.

It’s easy to look back and judge how people should act. However, if you were one of either John’s or Christ’s disciples, how easy it would have been for John’s imprisonment and then death to bring discouragement and doubt. In what ways do we allow similar things that happen to us to cause the same questions, the same doubts in our minds? What can we learn from the story of John that will help us keep trusting God in all situations?

STEPHEN, THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR—STONED TO DEATH (Acts 7:54–8:2).

“Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul” (Acts 7:58, RSV).

As background to his stoning, read Stephen’s response to the high priest’s accusation that Stephen had spoken against Moses, God, the Holy Place, and the law (see Acts 7:1-53).

Stephen, the foremost of the seven deacons, was a man of deep piety and faith. Though Jewish, he spoke Greek and was familiar with the customs and manners of the Greeks. He was very active in the cause of Christ and so good at what he did that people “were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10). His success, in many ways, helped seal his doom. If he were weak, vacillating, ineffective, he probably would have been spared.

Summarize Stephen’s most forceful accusations. See verses 51-53. Why do you think the leaders were so enraged?

Could it be because they knew the truth of his words?

Look at the difference between the death of John the Baptist and Stephen. John, rotting in a dank, dark, and lonely dungeon, is killed as a result of a drunken oath; in contrast, Stephen, speaking before a massive crowd and offering a powerful, public testimony to Christ, is just before his death “full of the Holy Spirit,” who gives him a vision of “heaven . . . and . . . the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55, 56, RSV). Stephen, in one sense, went out “in a blaze of glory,” as compared to John’s rather “ignoble” demise. Ellen White wrote that Stephen’s godly demeanor in death greatly impacted Saul of Tarsus, who eventually became the apostle Paul. Yet however different the circumstances of their deaths, both John and Stephen were faithful servants of Christ.

Elisabeth Elliott’s missionary husband was killed by Indians in South America. Elisabeth responded by converting to Christ the very natives who had martyred her husband. In many ways, the deaths of martyrs takes on a significance according to the way we react to them. How does our reaction to Christian martyrs (or any tragedy) give them a meaning they otherwise might not have?

PETER—CRUCIFIED UPSIDE DOWN (John 21:18, 19).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go” (John 21:18, RSV).

This text is the only reference to the way Peter died, a statement by Christ foretelling the manner of Peter’s death (John 21:19).

Through His words to Peter, Christ showed that He knew not only that Peter would die for Him but how. Nevertheless, Jesus still said to him, “Follow me.” What does this tell us about how much serving Christ can cost?

“Stretch forth thy hands. An obvious reference to crucifixion (see vs. 19). According to tradition, . . . Peter met death by crucifixion with his head down, on the plea that to be crucified like his Master was too great an honor for the one who had denied his Lord (see AA 537, 538).”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1072.

Peter was highly chosen and favored among the disciples. Then, three times, he denied his Lord. He was eventually restored to favor, even becoming one of the authors of the New Testament. Finally, he died a martyr’s death.

Despite his eventual victory in Christ, Peter did have spiritual lows. Even after being restored to favor with Christ, he still blundered. (See Gal. 2:11-20).

Yet Peter endured, even to the end, which is not surprising, especially when you read his epistles. In them, Peter showed he understood the trials that those who served Christ would face and how little these trials were in contrast to the reward that awaits the faithful at the Second Coming. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6, 7).

English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson once wrote: “If there is no immortality, I will throw myself into the sea.” In so many words, he expressed the futility of life without the hope of eternity. Though we might never face a martyr’s death, in what ways does the hope of eternity help us endure the trials we face here?

FURTHER STUDY: Thwarted Murderers and Their Targets. This week's lesson reviewed the martyrdoms of five of God's messengers. But not all persecutors of God's people claimed success. The Bible record testifies to many who were spared death, their would-be murderers thwarted.

Notice the references in 2 Peter 2:4-8 that Peter uses as support for his assertion that God can both protect the righteous *and* punish the wicked:

God Can Preserve	God Can Destroy
Penitent humans Noah Lot	Evil angels The ancient world Sodom and Gomorrah

These examples prove, consequently, that "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (2 Pet. 2:9, 10, RSV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Sometimes God intervenes in marvelous ways, other times nature, or even evil itself, seems to be allowed to run its course. Considering the stories read this week, why must we be very careful about judging someone's spiritual walk by his or her fate? In other words, how easy it would be, for instance, to think that John the Baptist did something evil to deserve his fate?
2. Though this week's lesson dealt with those who were martyrs for Christ, it has been said that "It's easier to die for God than live for Him." What does that mean?
3. As mentioned at the beginning of the week, the word *martyr* comes from the same word as *witness*. Martyrs do, indeed, witness for their faith. What about those who die in obscurity for the Lord? In what ways are they witnesses? To whom do they witness, and when?

SUMMARY: Those called to serve Christ might have to do so at the cost of their lives. Considering the reward, the price is cheap enough.



I Must Obey, Part 1

Charlotte Ishkanian

Joseph Wilba was a busy advisor to the former prime minister of Chad. His work was fulfilling, but he felt spiritually empty. He needed a relationship with God, but church attendance disappointed him.

One day while driving to an appointment, the need to seek God became so overwhelming that Wilba ordered his driver to stop the car. "God has called me, and I must obey!" he said later. He returned home a different man. His only desire was to find God. He fasted and prayed that God would show him a church that follows the Bible.

One day he met a man selling books on the street. He asked the man what church he represented, and the man named the Adventist church. Wilba knew nothing about this church, but something about this man impressed him. Wilba invited him to his home.

The man invited Wilba's family to visit the Adventist church, but Wilba hesitated. However, his wife urged him to give the church a try.

Wilba found the worship service compelling. The people sang with such enthusiasm, and the sermon was straight from the Bible. But the fellowship among believers touched him most. The family decided to return.

When the pastor visited the family the following week, Wilba asked him, "Why do you worship on Saturday instead of Sunday?" The pastor showed Wilba Bible texts regarding the Sabbath. As they studied, God opened Wilba's eyes. He wondered how so many could be wrong when the Bible was so clear. In the face of the evidence, Wilba knew he must obey. He quit working on Saturdays so he could attend church.

Wilba's boss, the prime minister, asked him why he no longer attended meetings on Saturdays. Wilba explained that God commands His followers to worship Him on the seventh day, the Sabbath, and he had to obey.

The prime minister told him that if he wished to worship God on Saturday he should quit his job. Then he watched Wilba's reaction. Would he obey God's commands if it meant losing his job? But Wilba had already made his decision. He told the prime minister, "I must obey God, and if that means losing my job, then I am willing to trust God to provide another job."

Silence filled the room. The prime minister, seeing that Wilba was serious, gave him permission to worship God on Saturday and keep his job. Three months later Wilba, his wife, and daughter were baptized.

(continued next week)

Joseph Wilba was advisor to the former prime minister of Chad and a local elder in the Adventist church in N'Djamena, Chad.

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Giants of Faith



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 11.

MEMORY TEXT: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Though hardly perfect and needing correction, rebuke, and—most importantly—grace, the men and women recorded in Hebrews 11 all share one common trait: They learned to live beyond the narrow spectrum of what is seen, and they grasped instead, by faith, the promise of the unseen.

PERFECT FAITH—SEEING THE UNSEEN. In his harshly anti-religious play, *Waiting for Godot*, French playwright Samuel Beckett depicted two hobos living on a road, waiting day after day for this mysterious Mr. Godot, who keeps promising to come but never does. This play was Beckett's metaphorical mocking of the Christian faith, the belief in something promised that never appears, at least not yet.

Beckett's problem, however, isn't the problem for the cast of characters listed in Hebrews 11, these giants of faith who have learned to see beyond the limited world of sight alone. From Abel to Abraham, Samson to Samuel, Isaac to the Israelites, Jacob and Joseph, and more—all these people grasped by faith the promises of God, promises of something not yet seen but guaranteed by the blood of Christ, a promise of something so much better than this world could ever offer.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (vs. 13).

ABEL—SACRIFICE OF FAITH (Heb. 11:4).

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (Heb. 11:4).

It’s rather interesting that Abel would be listed among those who exercised faith. Inspiration is clear that God interacted with him in a close, personal way. Genesis 4:4 says that “Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering” (NKJV). Ellen White wrote that after Abel brought his offering, “fire flashed from heaven and consumed the sacrifice.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 71. How many of us would struggle for faith if, after each time we sacrificed an animal, fire flashed down from heaven and consumed it? Nevertheless, Abel is listed, first even, among those who are considered exemplars of faith.

If faith is believing in what we don’t see, what was Abel showing faith over by offering sacrifices?

Abel’s faith wasn’t so much regarding the existence of God (which must have been pretty clear to him) but regarding salvation in Christ. His sacrifices symbolized his trust in, and understanding of, the great plan of redemption, in which God Himself would pay the penalty for our transgression of His holy law and thus free us from the condemnation that our transgression has brought. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1, NKJV).

By his “more excellent sacrifice,” Abel showed his total dependence upon the merits of the promised Savior, who had not yet come. In fact, it takes more faith to trust, not in our own good works or in anything we do, but in the works of someone else, in this case Jesus Christ.

How interesting, too, that by this “work” of offering a sacrifice—which itself symbolizes just how futile our works are for salvation—Abel “obtained witness that he was righteous.”

Where did Abel’s righteousness come from? Was it from offering the sacrifice? Or did it come from the righteousness of the One symbolized by that sacrifice?

Explain your answer in the context of what Christ has done at the cross.

ENOCH—THE MAN WHO WALKED WITH GOD (Heb. 11:5, 6).

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Heb. 11:5).

Genesis 5:24 says that “Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.” The verb “walked” here appears in a relatively uncommon Hebrew verb form that gives the idea of continuity; it’s the same form used in Job 1:7, when Satan, asked by God what he was doing, said that he was “walking up and down” upon the earth. Thus the idea in Genesis, and expanded in Hebrews, is that Enoch’s life was one of continual faith and obedience to the Lord.

Hebrews 11:6 says: “And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (RSV). What do you think this verse means?

Without faith it is impossible to please God because without faith it’s impossible to know God, and knowing God is crucial for a religion whose most important command is to, indeed, “love God” (after all, how can you love what you don’t know?).

Through the years, philosophers and theologians have devised many sophisticated arguments for the existence of God (with such fancy names as the cosmological, the teleological, and the ontological arguments). Yet however far these arguments go, they never go far enough. God is so far beyond our fallen minds that there is always the need for faith, which is belief in something we don’t totally see or understand. If we could totally see it or understand it, then there would be no room for faith. We don’t need faith to believe that the sky is over our heads. We can look up and see it. Faith is needed, instead, to believe in the God who lives beyond that sky, because we can’t see Him.

Alfonso has a college professor, an avowed atheist, who never misses a chance to tell Alfonso that Christian faith is blind. What kind of answers can Alfonso give to show that Christians have many good reasons for their faith? Also, can you give examples of how we exercise faith—that is, belief in things we don’t see or totally understand—in the everyday secular realm of our lives?

SACRIFICE OF THE “ONLY BEGOTTEN SON” (Heb. 11:17-19),

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son” (Heb. 11:17).

Unquestionably, the most moving, powerful, and illuminating representation of the gospel appeared in the incredible story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22), where Abraham was called to offer “his only begotten son” as a sacrifice for sin. What parent, even under normal circumstances, could have shown the faith that Abraham did, under circumstances so far from normal? What a painful, even frightful, lesson about just how costly our redemption was!

Hebrews 11:17 says that Abraham was called to offer “his only begotten son.” What other well-known verse talks about an “only begotten son” offered for the world?

The big difference, of course, between John 3:16 and the story of Isaac and Abraham on Moriah is that Isaac was spared; Jesus wasn't. If we were to be saved, Christ had to die. There was no way around it. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14; emphasis supplied). However painful the process for both Isaac and his father—how much worse it must have been for Jesus and His Father at the Cross.

Even before the angel stopped Abraham from slaying his son, which promise (Heb. 11:19) gave him hope that even if Isaac died, Abraham would see him again?

Abraham's hope ultimately must be the final hope of all of us: the resurrection of the dead at the second coming of Christ and the inauguration of a whole new existence. This is the great promise, the promise all these people depicted in Hebrews 11 died in faith hoping for, even if they didn't yet see it (Heb. 11:13). Anything short of that promise leaves us, really, with nothing at all to hope for but this life with its pains, sufferings, and disappointments.

Someone once said that without the promise of the Second Coming, Christ's death at the first coming was a waste of time. Do you agree or disagree with that concept? Explain your answer.

RAHAB, THE UNLIKELY ACCOMPLICE (Heb. 11:31).

“By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace” (Heb. 11:31).

A heathen harlot who lied and who committed what only could be called “treason” is listed in this roster of faith along with such Bible stars as Sarah (the only other woman mentioned in Hebrews 11), Enoch, and Abel. How could that be? The answer is simple: it’s called the grace of God.

Joshua 2 gives answers that greatly help unravel this mystery. Rahab, whatever her seamy background, was moved by the powerful witness of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea and defeating enemy kings. In other words, she realized that only the living God, the true God, could have given such a miraculous deliverance. She said to the spies: “For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side of Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed” (Josh. 2:10).

The key, however, to understanding Rahab is found in verse 11 of Joshua 2. What does she say there that shows her faith?

Rahab confessed with her mouth the reality of the true God, a faith that was manifested by her works, in this case risking her life to help the spies. Like the rest of the characters mentioned in Hebrews, her faith had been manifested in works. “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18).

The writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, believed that her faith was genuine; she was not just switching sides in the middle of the game in order to be with the sure winners. Rahab, obviously, manifested true faith, which is why she—a prostitute—was placed where she was. God’s grace extends even to pagan harlots.

Of course, the problem with using Rahab as an example of faith is her lie about the spies. Does this incident justify lying? Remember, here was a newly converted woman probably not well-versed in the theology of ancient Israel, which is why using her to justify lying isn’t expedient. Was she being heralded in Hebrews for her lie—or for her faith?

WE CAN'T FORGET THESE EITHER (Heb. 11:32).

“And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets” (Heb. 11:32, RSV).

“What shall I more say? The list might be extended indefinitely, but enough illustrations have been provided to prove the principle that faith and faithfulness are the essence of godly living.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 477.

In the first part of the chapter, the author of Hebrews defends each person's choice, relating specific accomplishments they all made because of faith. Later he just records names with no supporting details as to why he included them.

Look up the scriptures most likely associated with these names and list reasons why Paul probably included them in Hebrews 11. (The texts are suggested by the editors of *The SDA Bible Commentary*, pp. 477, 478.)

- Gideon (Judges 6 and 7) _____
- Barak (Judges 4 and 5) _____
- Samson (Judges 13 to 16) _____
- Jephthah (Judges 11) _____
- David (1 and 2 Samuel) _____
- Samuel (1 Samuel 2 to 25) _____
- The Prophets (Acts 7:52) _____

“The writer's purpose was not to prepare a catalogue of all of God's faithful . . . but only to illustrate his point that faith and faithfulness are essential to patient waiting for the coming of the Lord. . . .”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 477.

Look at all the names listed in Hebrews and notice that all these men and women had faults, some rather bad ones. If these giants of faith were flawed, what kind of hope should that give to us, we who love God, have faith, and yet struggle with character defects, as well?

FURTHER STUDY: Who Might These Have Been? (Read the general categories in Hebrews 11:33-39).

“Who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight . . . were tortured . . . suffered mocking and scourging . . . were stoned . . . sawn in two . . . killed with the sword . . . destitute, afflicted, ill-treated” (Heb. 11:33-37, RSV).

First, the author gives names and reasons; then he just lists the names. Finally, the last verses of Hebrews 11 explain the trials endured but offer no specific characters who endured them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Who are some of the other giants of faith who are not mentioned? What about Daniel or Ezra or Jeremiah? Draw up your own list, only this time name characters from New Testament times.
2. Though Hebrews 11 is known as the great “faith” chapter, notice how closely works are tied in with faith. Noah (vs. 7) obeyed and built the ark, Abraham (vs. 8) obeyed and left his home, Moses obeyed and kept the passover (vs. 28), and so forth. In other words, though their faith is heralded in this chapter, it was their works that proved their faith. What lessons about the importance of works can be drawn from these examples? On the other hand, what lessons about the importance of works should *not* be drawn from it?
3. Read Hebrews 11:40 and discuss what the author is saying there. What was this “something better” that we all are waiting for and all will receive together?

SUMMARY: Despite their faults, these giants of faith learned a crucial lesson about living beyond the moment, living beyond the mere temporary and, ultimately, unsatisfying things of this world and, instead, reaching out on the promise of God, who through Christ offers us “a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Heb. 11:16).



I Must Obey, Part 2

Charlotte Ishkanian

Once Joseph Wilba had found the church he had prayed for, he did not want to be anywhere else. He praised God for leading him to His kingdom, and did not hesitate to share his faith with others. He invited the prime minister and several other government ministers to the church for special meetings, and several of them came.

He served his church with the same fervor. On Sabbath evening following a Week of Prayer, Wilba seemed unusually happy. His response, as usual, was "Jesus is coming soon! We all must be ready!"

On Sunday morning he surprised his wife when he came to breakfast dressed in his Sabbath clothes. Questioned about his attire, he told her, "I must obey my Father. I am going visiting. I must warn my brothers, my friends, my relatives that there is no time to waste. Christ is coming soon!" That day he visited many people he had worked with, including the former prime minister, delivering his message of Jesus' soon coming.

He arrived at church in time to take part in the Sunday evening youth program. After the program he boarded his motorcycle to go home. A young boy begged Wilba to take him along, but the older man responded gently, "You must wait for your own time." The boy waved as his friend rode off down the dirt road toward home. He assumed the man had meant, "Wait until you are old enough to own your own motorcycle." But the remark did not sound like Wilba.

As he neared his home, two men riding bicycles crossed his path. He pressed hard on the hand brake to avoid hitting the bicyclists. The motorcycle's wheels locked, and he was thrown off. He died instantly.

The unexpected death of such a well-known man shocked the capital city of Chad. Hundreds who attended his funeral heard the same testimony that Wilba had believed and practiced, that Jesus is indeed coming soon. For him it will be as if in an instant.



Joseph Wilba (left) served as advisor to the former prime minister of Chad and was an active lay member of the Adventist church in N'Djamena, Chad. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

Women in Scripture



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Read the texts for Deborah, Esther, Ruth, Mary (Jesus' mother), and Mary Magdalene as given for each day's study.

MEMORY TEXT: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Although not as frequently mentioned as men, women in the Bible nevertheless have played crucial roles in the drama of God's church.

A VARIED ROSTER. "Evil or exemplary, elderly or young, well-known or obscure, a little under 200 women are named in Scripture. Several hundred others are referenced in categories: daughters (Methuselah's daughters; Philip's daughters); wives (Noah's wife; Solomon's wives); mothers (Micah's mother; Elisha's mother); widows (widow whose oil was multiplied; widow of Nain . . .); and other unnamed women (the nurse who let a child fall; woman with seven husbands)." —Edith Deen, *All of the Women of the Bible* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Pub., 1988), pp. xii-xvii.

As Ms. Deen wrote this book, she testifies to the effect of this vicarious contact: "These women of antiquity became my personal friends and daily companions as I worked month after month from 5:00 a.m. until bedtime writing, rewriting and studying. Often it seemed that such vivid personalities as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, were actually in my sunny yellow study. I discovered their stories are among the most exciting on record. Here in this Bible portrait gallery—the greatest in all literature—are women of our common humanity."—pp. xx, xxi.

May this week's studies reward you likewise.

DEBORAH—WARRIOR OF FAITH (Judges 4–5).

“And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go” (Judg. 4:8).

Wife, counselor, judge, and war hero, Deborah remains one of the most fascinating women in Scripture. Though not much is revealed about her personally, the little told does show that she was highly respected by the nation she judged.

What was the “secret” of Deborah’s success? The answer appears in various places throughout chapter 4, which deals with the defeat of Sisera’s army.

One of the most interesting exchanges in all Old Testament history appears in this story (Judg. 4:8). Israel, heavily oppressed by a foreign power, cries out to the Lord. Deborah, speaking for the Lord, tells Barak, a military commander, to take ten thousand men and fight, for the Lord will give them victory under the command of Sisera (vss. 6, 7). Barak with a mighty army of his own and the promise of victory given him by the Lord—nevertheless refuses to go unless . . . *unless Deborah will accompany him into battle.*

What was it about this woman that instilled such confidence that even a military leader—given assurance by God of victory—refuses to fight unless Deborah comes? The answer has to be that Deborah’s faith in and relationship to God was well-known; thus even an army, with all its carnal weapons of warfare, was reluctant to move without her.

Was Deborah herself the one whom he wanted there, or was it what she represented that made Barak seek her presence? Or, perhaps, did Barak, not utterly confident of victory, think that as long as this woman of God was there, they could never lose?

The story doesn’t end with the defeat of the enemy army. Even before the fighting began, Deborah told Barak that Sisera would be delivered into “the hand of a woman” (vs. 9)—exactly what happened when Jael, wife of Heber, drove a spike through his temple (vss. 17–22). For whatever reasons, the Lord not only wanted to use women in a special way to give Israel victory, but it seems He wanted the men to know that He would be using women to accomplish His purposes.

What does this story tell us about prejudging anyone’s fitness, especially based on gender, in working for the Lord?

ESTHER—RELUCTANT HEROINE (Esther 4:14).

“And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14b, RSV).

The story of Esther has resonated through the centuries as an example of a faithful, courageous woman working hard to save her people from destruction. Yet it's not so simple. Instead, this is a story that deals with a woman—pushed by circumstances beyond her control—having to choose between only bad options. Who hasn't also found themselves in similar situations, with only bad choices before them?

Were Esther's actions totally selfless? What did Mordecai, her uncle, say that motivated Esther to take the risk she did? See Esther 4:13-15.

If what Mordecai said were true—that if she kept silent, “relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another quarter”(RSV), and that she and her father's house would alone perish—then Esther's actions, however successful, seem to have arisen from self-interest. According to the story, she seemed reluctant to intervene with the king because of the potential danger.

Though we aren't privy to Esther's innermost thoughts, it apparently took the harsh words of her uncle to motivate her. Whatever, ultimately, her motives were, Esther's response—“And so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish” (4:16)—shows a person willing to step out in faith, no matter the cost to herself. Indeed, that's the only kind of faith that really counts.

As fallen beings, all that we do is tainted with sin. Our good works, even works done out of love and faith, are impure. The incense burned in the sanctuary symbolizes the righteousness of Christ, which needs to cover even our prayers, which in and of themselves are impure because they come from impure and fallen beings. What we can learn, perhaps, from the book of Esther is that, however important good motives might be, if we waited until our motives were perfect, totally selfless, and absolutely pure—we might not get anything done, even for the Lord.

Is it possible to work for the Lord even if our motives are not perfect? Can fallen beings ever have perfectly pure motives? What can all this teach us about our utter need for the imputation of Christ's righteousness over all that we do?

RUTH—THE PROGENITOR OF CHRIST (Ruth 1-4).

“And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16, 17).

Read the short book of Ruth to remind you of its plot: “The book of Ruth is a short story mainly concerned to supply a link in the narrative of the lineage of King David [and hence Christ]. . . . A grim stage has been set. During the time of the judges famine lay hard on the land. A native of Judah named Elimelech went abroad to Moab to try to improve his luck. But he died young, leaving his widow, Naomi, with two sons. The sons took Moabite wives, Ruth and Orpah, but the sons also died. So the three women found themselves alone, without the men they needed to be secure in a patriarchal society.”—Denise Carmody, *Biblical Woman: Contemporary Reflections on Scriptural Texts* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1988), pp. 32, 33.

When Naomi plans to return to Judah, both daughters-in-law offer to go with her. Ultimately, Orpah stays but Ruth goes with Naomi.

Though Ruth’s expression of fidelity to Naomi is often viewed as an example of friendship, it goes much deeper. Ruth expresses fidelity to Naomi’s God, as well. One daughter returns to her own people and her “own gods,” the other stays with the Lord and the Lord’s people. What spiritual lessons can be learned from this incident?

The mother of all mothers-in-law: The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is not always the best; in fact it’s often the source of jokes. Yet something happened between these women that caused each of the wives to love her mother-in-law. Both women at first even sought to remain with her after their husbands died. “And they said to her, ‘Surely we will return with you to your people’” (Ruth 1:10, NKJV). Something about Naomi drew them to her.

However beautiful and powerful the truths that God has given us, many people will be turned away because of bad interpersonal relationships. What can this story teach us about the power—and the limitations—of good relationships in soul-winning?

MARY—MOTHER OF JESUS (Luke 1:30, 31).

“And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus’ ” (Luke 1:30, 31, RSV).

As the mother of Jesus, Mary stands apart from all women in all history, for in her womb alone the Creator of the universe stepped into humanity (an almost inconceivable concept!). No woman in the entire history of the world has been so honored and revered, even to the point of idolatry. No doubt, both her cousin and the angel Gabriel were right when they said to her, “Blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28, 42).

When the angel first approached Mary, he said that she had found “favor” with God. The Greek word for “favor,” kairin, is the exact word the Septuagint (an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) used in translating Genesis 6:8—“But Noah found grace (kairin) in the eyes of the Lord.” Though, obviously, both Noah and Mary had special characteristics that enabled the Lord to use them, what does the word kairin (grace or favor) imply, in terms of their deserving the roles that they had been given?

Mary’s response to the news that though she “knew” no man she would nevertheless be pregnant by the Holy Spirit, in many ways exemplifies the essence of living by faith. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38, RSV).

Imagine yourself, as much as possible, in her position. An angel comes and tells her that something utterly unbelievable will happen, something that human rationality and reason and “science” say is impossible. Her own words in verse 34 show how hard it is for her, logically, to grasp what was promised. Yet, though she doesn’t fully understand, she has been given enough evidence to trust anyway. Here, in many ways, is the beauty of Mary and why the Lord was able to use her for such a crucial task. Her childlike faith in the promises of God makes her such a wonderful example to all who profess faith in the same God.

As Christians, in what ways do we need the same experience as Mary, that of trusting God in things that don’t seem logical or possible? What practical steps can we take to develop that same kind of faith?

MARY—SINFUL WOMAN FORGIVEN (Luke 7:36-50).

“And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment” (Luke 7:37, 38).

Though not named in the text itself, the woman here is Mary Magdalene, the same woman who was among the first at the tomb on the morning of the Resurrection (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1, 2). She was also one of the first to inform the disciples of the Resurrection (Matt. 28:7, 8; Luke 24:1-10; John 20:18) and the first (or among the first) to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection (Matt. 28:1, 5, 6, 9). What a long way she progressed from this sad scene in Luke 7!

What was the main, and crucial, difference between Simon, the Pharisee, and Mary, in terms of their relationship to Jesus? The answer is found in the parable Jesus told in Luke 7:41, 42.

Though no details are given, according to the story, Mary had been quite a sinner. If one wanted to push the parable further, her sins were 10 times as manifold and as great as Simon’s. Nevertheless Simon, not Mary, is the one who’s rebuked in the story, because he’s the one who didn’t show true repentance and thankfulness, as Mary did. In many ways, Simon represents those who in their own self-righteousness don’t see the need to fall broken and weeping at the feet of Christ, even though Simon—as everyone else—is a condemned sinner who has “nothing with which to repay” (vs. 44) his debt.

“The one who had fallen, and whose mind had been a habitation of demons, was brought very near to the Saviour in fellowship and ministry. It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil, and bathed His feet with her tears. Mary stood beside the cross, and followed Him to the sepulcher. Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 568.

In what ways is Mary’s experience a profound example of how the plan of salvation works, not only in forgiving sinners but in changing their lives?

FURTHER STUDY: Feminine Images of the Deity. Although God references Himself in male images such as father and brother, the Scriptures contain both masculine and feminine metaphors to symbolize Deity.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (Matt. 23:37, RSV).

“I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isa. 46:4b).

“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee” (Isa. 49:15).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What other feminine images are used in the Bible to describe God? What points are these images (or any others) trying to get across? In other words, the images aren't meant to be literal but figurative. Look at various metaphors about God and try and see what the author is saying.
2. Why do you think that God uses imagery, or symbols, to teach us about Himself?
3. Feminine imagery isn't just used for God. Look at both Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12:17. Why is God's church described with the imagery of a woman? What point is He making?
4. The Lord has clearly used women throughout salvation history, often giving them crucial roles to play in the story of redemption. What lessons can we derive from these examples that help us understand the role of women in the church today?

SUMMARY: Whether as queens, judges, prostitutes, or mothers, women have certainly played crucial roles in the history of God's people. We can all, male and female, learn from their examples, both good and bad.



The Defiant Rudder

Harry Gai*

Five missionaries, including some students from Mountain View College joined me on a trip to visit several islands off the southern coast of Mindanao in the Philippines. This was the maiden voyage of our new boat, donated to help us extend our outreach to our Muslim friends.

Our pilot was a sea gypsy, a man who had grown up on the sea. These people know the ocean well, and some even say they have an inner compass to guide them. It is said that the only time a sea gypsy sets foot on land is when he is buried.

Before long I noticed that something was wrong. We were off course. I asked our pilot about it, and he replied that something must be wrong with the rudder; for he could not control the boat. The boat had been designed with an especially large rudder, so it would be more responsive, but instead it seemed to go its own way in spite of all the efforts put forth by the pilot.

We came into view of an Adventist settlement of homes that stands on stilts in the shallow waters off a coral island. We decided to stop and try to repair the rudder. While we worked on the boat, we learned that one of the pioneer Adventists in the area, an old man, was very sick. The symptoms sounded as though he had malaria.

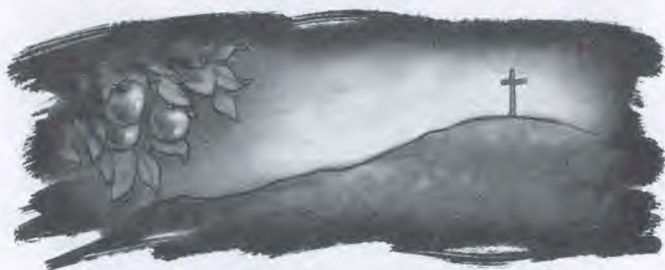
I climbed the ladder to his home and prayed with him. Then we rubbed him with some rubbing alcohol, the only medicine we had with us. As we turned to leave, the man, a sea gypsy himself, struggled to sit up then gave us some advice. "If the rudder defies you, cancel your trip."

We decided that was good advice and started back toward our base. Immediately the pilot noticed that the rudder responded properly, even though we had not fixed it.

When we arrived at our base, we learned that a band of pirates had killed 21 people not far from our intended destination. Had we continued on our planned path, we would have been in the direct path of these pirates. As pioneer missionaries, we do not shrink from danger. But we are convinced that on that day God sent His angel to control our rudder and guide us safely away from the pirates.

***Harry Gai is a pseudonym. He is a full-time worker among the Muslims in the islands off Mindanao, in the Philippines.**

Tiny Sins, Huge Results



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Gen. 19:26; Lev. 10:1, 2; Judg. 16:17; 2 Kings 5:20-27; 1 Chronicles 13.

MEMORY TEXT: "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James 3:5b).

KEY THOUGHT: All sin—small, medium, or large—offends, even greatly. Although in the memory text James refers specifically to the tongue, elsewhere he stresses the necessity of abstaining from all sin: "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (2:10, RSV).

TEENY, TINY SINS? A tempting fruit, a soothing voice—but out Eve went, thrust from the Garden. Was that fair? A rowdy mob, a rock struck in anger—and out Moses went, dying on a lonesome mountain, denied his consuming passion of Canaan's possession. Was that fair? A hidden golden wedge, some buried silver shekels, and a concealed Babylonish garment—and out Achan went, stoned to death and then burned. Was that fair? Such "insignificant" trespasses, such extreme effects? Who gets pardoned? Who gets death? Sometimes it's hard to understand.

"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely [sinful] players."—Shakespeare, *As You Like It*. All are sinners, so why are some graciously forgiven, others instantly punished? How can the same Jesus say to the adulterous woman "Go and sin no more" but say to Eve, Moses, and Achan "You're out of here!"

As you analyze this week's examples, perhaps you will get some clear answers, perhaps not. However, as we look at these stories, even the harder ones, we need to always understand them in the context of a loving and merciful God who proved His love and mercy at the Cross.

LOT'S WIFE—IMMORTALITY LOST FOR A MATERIAL WORLD (Gen. 19:15-26).

“Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; . . . But his [Lot’s] wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt” (Gen. 19:24, 26).

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). It profits him nothing.

One of the most vivid illustrations of this axiom lies in the Genesis account of Lot’s wife, who looked back to the city—where her home and possessions and some of her family remained—and refused to give it all up. As a result she lost not only what she coveted but everything else, as well.

How does the experience of Lot’s wife relate, in principle, to this hard saying of Jesus: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath”? (Matt. 13:12).

As God will lead but not force us in the path of righteousness, in like manner, the angels led Lot’s wife out of the city but would not change her heart. Physically, she had left the city, but emotionally she was still a citizen. “Fifteen words in the Old Testament tell the story of Lot’s wife. . . . The fifteen words are, ‘But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt’ (Gen. 19:26). . . . Can we not conjecture that the fifteen-word Old Testament biography of Lot’s wife was written for those who love the things of the world more than the things of the spirit, those who do not possess the pioneering courage to leave a life of ease and comfort and position for a life of sacrifice, hardship, and loneliness? Does not her biography also speak a message to those who are unwilling to flee from iniquity when all efforts to redeem iniquity have failed?”—Edith Deen, *All of the Women of the Bible* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Pub., 1955), pp. 17, 18.

God doesn’t demand that we give up everything we have in order to serve Him, because not everything we have is bad. What He does demand is that we be *willing* to give up everything. Why is that willingness so crucial to the Christian life? Hint, see John 14:30.

NADAB AND ABIHU—GONE IN A FLASH (Lev. 10:1, 2).

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron . . . offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev. 10:1, 2).

Notice the impressive company Nadab and Abihu kept: “And he [God] said unto Moses, Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off” (Exod. 24:1). These two men had been especially honored by the Lord, having been permitted with the seventy elders to behold God’s glory in the mount.

“They had heard the voice of God; they had been with Moses and Aaron in the mount of God; they had seen the God of Israel, and ‘did eat and drink’ (Ex. 24:9-11). They had been greatly favored; but had not profited by their opportunities.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 749.

Did their exalted status, high position, and great privileges have something to do with the extreme punishment they faced for their grievous sin? If so, what does that tell us about the responsibility any of us who have been given light, honor, or privileges have before the Lord?

For the modern, twenty-first century, it’s hard to understand why these two men should have faced such a radical punishment. After all, fire is fire. What is the difference?

The answer stems from the sacred nature of the sanctuary service and the crucial mission God had given to ancient Israel. Important and solemn truths were taught by the sanctuary service (indeed, the whole plan of salvation was contained in it!). God, therefore, gave specific instructions regarding its services. Had Nadab and Abihu, priests who were drunk (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 361, 362), not been punished for their sins, then the whole nation could have questioned whether God was that serious in the commands He gave them. On the other hand, if He would punish these men over the strange fire, certainly He meant business with other commands, as well! No doubt, after this incident, Israel understood that the Lord meant what He said.

The idea is sometimes pushed that spiritual principles alone are important, not specifics. God cares just about the principle, nothing else. Does the story of Nadab and Abihu debunk that notion? Give reasons for your answer, either way.

SAMSON—EYELESS IN GAZA (Judg. 16:16-31).

“ . . . And [Samson] said unto her [Delilah], There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother’s womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me” (Judg. 16:17).

Distinguished as one of only sixteen to be named in Hebrews 11, the faith chapter, Samson had in fact been groomed for greatness from before birth. His mother had been instructed to be temperate in order to pave the way for Samson’s calling. “For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judg. 13:5).

How did someone so destined for greatness end up as he did, a blind slave to the very people he had been raised up to help conquer?

In his famous play, *Samson Agonistes*, British poet John Milton depicted Samson, blinded and enslaved by the Philistines, sitting in the open air on a festival day and bemoaning his fate and the nasty turn of events in his life. Instead of fulfilling the promise that he “should deliver Israel from the Philistian yoke,” he instead finds himself “eyeless in Gaza” and lower “than a bond-slave.”

Yet, amid his sorrow, Milton’s Samson says that he will not “rashly call into doubt Divine prediction.” Instead, he asks whether or not all that had been foretold would have been fulfilled, except “through mine own default.” In other words, though the Lord had destined him for greatness, by his own bad decisions, that greatness had not been achieved. Though God could have great plans for us, we can—by disobedience—keep those plans from being fulfilled.

The story of Samson, in many ways, seems to depict the principle regarding conditionality. God will do wonderful things for us, but only if we allow Him to work in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

Thus, how careful we all need to be, especially those who believe that they have been called by God to work for Him. God can fulfill our potential only as far as we allow Him to.

What other Bible characters had great potential to do wonderful things for the Lord but ruined it, or hampered it, by bad decisions? How can we learn from their mistakes in order to avoid these same pitfalls?

GEHAZI—CONNIVING SERVANT (2 Kings 5:20-27).

“The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow” (2 Kings 5:27, KJV).

Naaman, a Syrian leader, is miraculously cured by the power of Israel’s God. “And he [Naaman] returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel” (2 Kings 5:15). What a powerful testimony from a pagan ruler!

As a result of his being cured, Naaman wanted to pay Elisha. “Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant,” the Syrian said to him (vs. 15). Naaman had, in fact, in anticipation of healing, brought with him some material goods as payment (see vs. 5).

How did Elisha respond to the offer? Why do you think he responded that way? Would it have been wrong for him to have taken it?

Elisha was quite adamant about not taking the silver and gold. “As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none” (vs.16). Meanwhile, Gehazi, his servant, saw Elisha’s response, yet he believed they should have been paid. As a result, he goes to Naaman, lies to get some payment, then goes back and lies to Elisha about what happened.

It’s not that hard, however, to understand Gehazi’s rationale. He probably justified in his mind numerous reasons why they should have been paid. *After all, is not there the principle that “the labourer is worthy of his reward”?* Besides, Naaman had plenty of wealth, and they didn’t. *Why shouldn’t they get something for all the hard work they did?*

Look at the insight that Ellen White gave regarding this incident: “The course of Gehazi was such as to place a stumbling block in the pathway of Naaman, upon whose mind had broken a wonderful light, and who was favorably disposed toward the service of the living God.” —Prophets and Kings, p. 252.

Though Gehazi’s lies could not be justified, the greater sin lies in how his actions could have been, as Ellen White said, “a stumbling block” to Naaman. How crucial is it that all those who seek to witness for the Lord be careful not to do anything that could cause someone to question their motives.

UZZAH—THE TOUCH OF DEATH (2 Sam. 6:1-11).

“And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God” (2 Sam. 6:7, NASB).

What was Uzzah’s act of irreverence? See vs. 6.

Of all the “insignificant” sins with high results we have studied—no punishment seems less justified than what happened to Uzzah’s. What’s going on here?

To bring the ark back to Jerusalem and have this powerful symbol of Divine presence in the city, David assembled 30,000 men. His enthusiasm over the ark ignited a celebration. The ark, placed upon a new cart and drawn by oxen, led the group: “David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord . . . on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals” (vs. 5). Suddenly, the exuberance ceased. Uzzah lay dead, struck down by God for touching the ark. A sudden pall of fear must have fallen upon the throng.

“To those accompanying Uzzah it might have seemed as if Uzzah’s intentions were perfectly honorable—he was only trying to assist when he stretched forth his hand to steady the ark. But his heart was not right with God. His act of touching the ark was one of presumption. . . . Uzzah’s death served as a warning to many that the Lord is a righteous God, who requires strict obedience from all.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, pp. 625, 626.

Fortunately, the story of Uzzah is not the only story in the Bible. If it were, one might really have cause to question God’s fairness. The fact is, however, that time and again the Lord has shown to humanity his infinite love, mercy, grace, and care for fallen humanity. *The same God who struck Uzzah dead was the same God who suffered at Calvary.* Thus, when incidents like Uzzah are depicted in the Bible, without much explanation, though it is not wrong to have questions, it’s wrong to use something like this to doubt God’s love, justice, or fairness. In most of these cases, there are simply many facts that have not been revealed to us. We have to go on faith.

How does one respond to skeptics who use incidents like this in Scripture to raise questions about God’s love, justice, or fairness? And, however good the answers we might be able to give, why do we need to realize that many things will remain a mystery to us for now? See 1 Corinthians 4:5.

FURTHER STUDY: Read the chapter in *The Great Controversy*, “The Origin of Evil.” Contrast that to the last chapter “The Controversy Ended” in the same book.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

1. Are there really “tiny” sins? Though there are certainly degrees of sin, can one accurately say that some sins are tiny or insignificant?
2. Along the same line of thinking with the previous question, do you think that even if all humankind had committed only “tiny” sins, then Christ would not have had to die? Explain your answer.
3. Not just in the Bible, but in “secular” life, we are faced with people who suffer terrible consequences for what seem to be little mistakes, while others who do grievous things don’t seem to face the consequences. How do we make sense of this fact, or don’t we? Considering this reality, why is it so important to put our final hope in Christ and in the promises that He offers us of eternity in a world without sin and suffering?

Who directs your life?

Saints and sinners, slaves and sovereigns, princes and paupers, pagans and prophets, lovely or loathsome, major or minor, courageous or cowardly, they’ve all been looked at this quarter.

And though many lessons can be learned from these studies, perhaps the most important is this: You, alone, are the key in determining your destiny. You have, really, only two choices in whatever ultimate destiny you face: either Christ and what He has planned for you or Satan and what he has planned for you. There’s no middle ground.

Pray that these lessons can help you see how crucial the right decision is as we move toward the final scenes of this drama called *Planet Earth*.

SUMMARY: To conclude these thirteen lessons, reviewing the lives of dozens of Bible personalities, Paul’s admonition seems particularly relevant: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1, 2, RSV).



Forgotten Book Brings Rich Harvest

While attending a birthday party for her brother, Jasia saw a book that caught her attention. She asked her brother what the book was about.

"I have not read it," he answered. "But I think it is some kind of history book."

Jasia borrowed the book, *The Great Controversy*, and began reading it. She was amazed to learn that most Christian churches had drifted away from the teachings of the Bible. When she finished reading the book she started over, this time checking each Scripture reference in her own Bible.

One day Jasia saw a man selling books at a table. She saw a book with a familiar title, *The Great Controversy*. She picked up the book and asked the man, "Who publishes this book?"

The man told her the book is published by Seventh-day Adventists. Then he added, "I am a Seventh-day Adventist."

"Where do you people meet for worship?" she asked. The man gave her the church's address. She wanted to visit the church, but she was afraid to tell her husband. Finally she said she was going shopping, then she set out to find the church. After her first worship service she decided to return.

When her husband learned that she was going to church, he reacted so violently that Jasia had to call the police to restrain him. Jasia took her two daughters to church with her, and in time all three of them were baptized.

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The publishing house in Poland has struggled to keep up with the demand for books by Ellen White, including *The Great Controversy*. More than 40,000 copies were sold in just a few months, while in previous years only about 2,500 copies were sold in a year.

One man traveled 250 kilometers (about 160 miles) to visit the publishing house and buy more books by Ellen White. Asked about his interest in these books, the man answered, "This book, *The Great Controversy*, saved my life. I have found so much help from reading this book, that I have decided to share it with others who have similar problems." The man purchased 300 books.

The books that have been scattered across Poland, some long forgotten, promise to bring a rich harvest as thousands of people search for truth.

J. H. Zachary, coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour and a special consultant for the General Conference Ministerial Association and the Trans-European Division, contributed to this report.

Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School-Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference
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Bible Study Guide for Third Quarter, 2001

This quarter's study guide, *Pillars of Our Faith*, written by Dr. Joel Musvosvi, will examine those distinctive biblical doctrines that underpin our identity as Seventh-day Adventists. We will study each doctrine from the perspective of Christ as the hub from whom all truth radiates. Each doctrine is to be viewed as a window that reveals Christ in all His matchless beauty.

Lesson 1: The Lord Our Righteousness (June 30–July 6).

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: Grace—the Divine Initiative (Rom. 3:24; 4:16).

Monday: Faith—the Human Response (Rom. 5:1).

Tuesday: Saved By Grace Through Faith (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Wednesday: The Riches of His Grace (Eph. 1:7).

Thursday: The Obedience of Faith (Rom. 1:1-5; James 2:14-26).

MEMORY TEXT: Jeremiah 23:6.

SABBATH GEM: To have and maintain a personal relationship with Jesus is the essence of the Christian life.

Lesson 2: The Sabbath (July 7-13).

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: Foundation of Creation (Gen. 1:1).

Monday: The Book of Exodus and the Sabbath (Exod. 16:4, 5, 13-30).

Tuesday: The Sabbath and Salvation (Isa. 56:1-7).

Wednesday: Jesus and the Sabbath (Mark 2:27, 28; Luke 4:16).

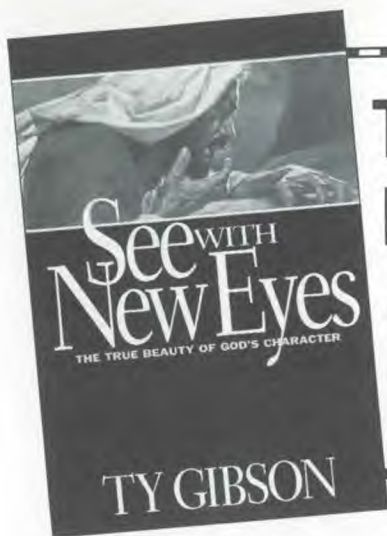
Thursday: The Sabbath and the Sanctuary (Exod. 31:12-18; Rev. 11:19).

MEMORY TEXT: Genesis 2:2, 3, NIV.

SABBATH GEM: The Sabbath helps tell us who we are, why we are here, and where we are ultimately going—all in just merely twenty-four hours!

Lessons in Braille

The regular adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in Braille and 16 2/3 rpm records to blind and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.



The True Beauty of God's Character

How many people have turned away from God because they looked for Him in a person or a religious group and were disappointed by what they saw? *See With New Eyes*, by Ty Gibson, is about God. It's not about people or religions that claim to represent God, but about God Himself, as He has represented Himself in the One true portrait of His character.

Through striking language and evocative illustrations, Ty shows that God is exactly the kind of person we had hoped He would be. But you must close your eyes and open your heart to see Him. This book will help you close your eyes to the ugly pictures of deity so prevalent in our world, and open your mind and emotions to the crystal clear image of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

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LIGHT FOR A
NEW MILLENNIUM

SOUTHERN ASIA DIVISION



Union	Churches	Companies	Membership	Population
Central India Union Section	391	814	166,736	260,478,900
Northeast India Union Section	141	202	30,058	40,073,700
Northern India Union Section	168	688	40,702	551,013,100
South India Union Section	487	643	111,534	150,562,300
Attached Fields	7	13	1,106	25,107,000
Totals	1,194	2,360	350,136	1,027,235,000

as of March 31, 2000



EAQ010401