

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
July | Aug | Sept 2025

EXODUS



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Exodus: Journey to the Promised Land



The God revealed in the book of Exodus is the loving Lord who at the appointed time—and with His mighty actions—brought salvation and deliverance to His people (*Gen. 15:12–16*). The exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea were pivotal and unique events—God’s spectacular and marvelous acts. No greater or more glorious event ever happened in the history of ancient Israel before the Cross. It is the gospel, but according to Moses.

God miraculously and repeatedly arose to demonstrate His care and protection for the Hebrews, despite their constant backslidings. His mercy surpassed all their understandings and feelings. With His outstretched arm, the Lord led His people to freedom. It was an unprecedented act. This unexpected series of divine interventions was the beginning of their renewed journey with God, a journey from Egypt to (eventually) Canaan.

Though Moses plays an important role in Exodus, this book is not about Moses but about God—the God of love, truth, justice, freedom, and forgiveness, the God who ultimately went to the cross for us. By studying Exodus, we get a unique look at what our God is really like.

And what is He really like? He is a God who was faithful to His people despite their unfaithfulness. He was constantly for them, even when they were against Him. Again and again, He showed them His mercy, bringing encouragement, correction, and divine instruction. Leading them in the best possible way, He wanted them voluntarily, out of love for Him and His character, to worship and obey, all for their own good.

The God of Moses is the God of relationships. The most important objective of God was not to accomplish something or to fulfill an agenda; instead, His prime objective was to create a meaningful relationship with His chosen people, Israel. He led them to Sinai in order to establish this deep fellowship.

The apostle Paul teaches that what happened to God's people in the past is an object lesson for us so that we could learn from their mistakes and faithfully follow the Lord today: "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11, ESV). These past events should be a warning and a source of unforgettable instruction for us now. We should read them, study them, and learn from them, because no matter how different the circumstances, the spiritual principles behind them remain the same.

The exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea were pivotal and unique events—God's spectacular and marvelous acts.

Our plan for studying the book of Exodus during these 13 weeks is transparent. The book is divided into weekly chapter readings of various lengths (divided thematically for convenience): (1) Slavery in Egypt, the birth of Moses, and Moses' first 40 years (Exodus 1, 2). (2) Commission of Moses (Exodus 3, 4). (3) Complications: when life becomes worse (Exodus 5, 6). (4) The first nine plagues (Exodus 7–10). (5) The tenth plague and the celebration of the Passover (Exodus 11, 12). (6) The liberation from Egypt, and the Red Sea experience (Exodus 13–15). (7) The journey to Mount Sinai (Exodus 16–18). (8) The gift of God's covenant and the Decalogue (Exodus 19, 20). (9) God's law applied (Exodus 21–23). (10) The covenant confirmed and the blueprint of the tabernacle (Exodus 24–31). (11) The golden calf apostasy and Moses' intercession (Exodus 32). (12) God's self-revelation and the radiant face of Moses (Exodus 33, 34). (13) The tabernacle built and dedicated (Exodus 35–40). Each week we focus on key passages and events from indicated chapters.

May our gracious Lord bless us as we study this pivotal book that reminds us of how God wants to lead His people from slavery to freedom, from death to life, and from the wilderness to the New Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22).

Jiří Moskala is professor of Old Testament exegesis and theology, and dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

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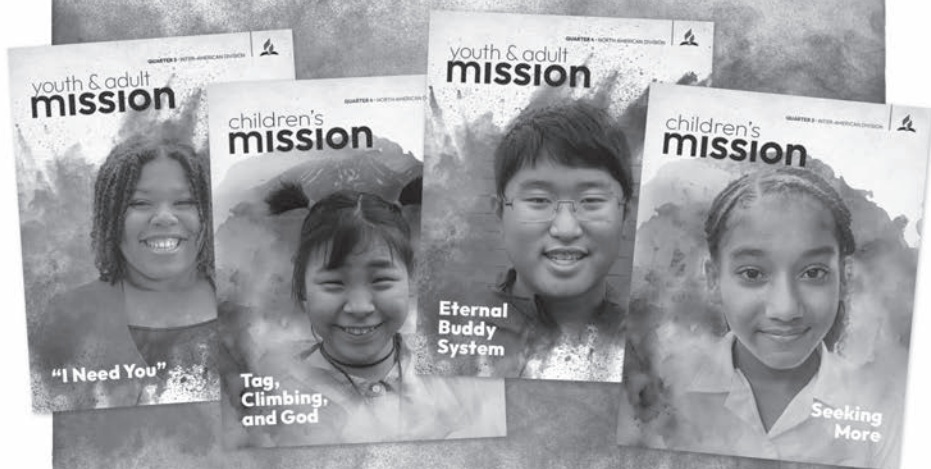
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Oppression: The Background *and the Birth of Moses*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 1:1–22; Gen. 37:26–28; Gen. 39:2, 21; Acts 7:6; Gal. 3:16, 17; Exod. 2:1–25.*

Memory Text: “The children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them” (*Exodus 2:23–25, NKJV*).

The book of Exodus resonates with accounts of the oppressed, the marginalized, the persecuted, the exploited, and the degraded. Thus, people today who feel abandoned, forgotten, and enslaved can find hope, because the same God who saved the Hebrews can save them as well.

The book of Exodus speaks to the existential battles of life and to the injustices and trials that are part of this life. Everyone can be encouraged by the stories of God's interventions in favor of His suffering people. God hears the cry of the oppressed, sees their struggles, notes their tears, and, in their agony, comes to help.

God takes the initiative to deliver those who trust in Him. We need simply to accept, by faith, what He offers us. This is why the book of Exodus should be studied, for it points to what Jesus has done for us all. It is a book about redemption, deliverance, and final salvation—all of which are ours, by faith, in Christ Jesus and what He has secured for us.

In the midst of the turmoil and darkness, if our eyes are fixed on God, we can recognize His presence, care, and help as He guides us to the eternal Promised Land.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 5.

God's People in Egypt

The book of Exodus is called in Hebrew *shemot*, literally “names” in English, according to the opening words of that ancient document. “And these are the names” is how it begins. The names of the patriarch Jacob’s family are enumerated right at the start.

Read Exodus 1:1–7. What crucial truth is found here?

The book of Exodus begins with a reminder of God’s blessing. When the patriarch Jacob and his family settled in Egypt, they were only 70 people (*Gen. 46:27, Exod. 1:5*); but the Israelites “were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them” (*Exod. 1:7, NKJV*). By the time of the Exodus, however, they counted “about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children” (*Exod. 12:37, NKJV*).

Read Exodus 1:8–11. What was the situation of the Israelites at the time of the Exodus?

The biblical text paints the story of the children of Israel in Egypt in dark colors. The book of Exodus begins with their enslavement by Egyptian taskmasters and the oppressive labor that they imposed upon the Hebrews. The book of Exodus ends, however, with God’s peaceful and comforting presence in the tabernacle, at the center of the Israelite camp (*see Exodus 40*). In between these two opposite poles, God’s triumph is described. By the Lord’s liberating His people from slavery, by His opening the Red Sea, and by His defeating the strongest army of that time, God’s spectacular victory over the forces of evil is revealed.

The story paradoxically stresses that the more the oppressors “afflicted them [the Israelites], the more they multiplied and grew” (*Exod. 1:12, NKJV*). That is, no matter the human machinations, God is still sovereign and will save His people, even if circumstances appear hopeless, at least from a human perspective.

A new king arose who knew not Joseph. What does this account tell us about how we should never take circumstances, especially good ones, for granted?

The Historical Background

When Jacob's family arrived in Egypt after experiencing famine in Canaan (*Genesis 46*), the Egyptian king was friendly toward the Hebrews because of Joseph and all that he had done for the Egyptians.

"And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, 'Bow the knee!' So he set him over all the land of Egypt" (*Gen. 41:41–43, NKJV*).

What was the key to Joseph's amazing success in Egypt after such a rough start? (Read *Gen. 37:26–28* and *Gen. 39:2, 21*.)

The most plausible historical background to the Joseph story is the following: the new ruler, in Exodus 1:8 (*ESV*), "who did not know Joseph," is Ahmose (1580–1546 BC). Next came Amenhotep I (1553–1532 BC), the ruler who feared the Israelites and oppressed them. Later Thutmose I (1532–1514 BC) issued the death decree for all the Hebrew male children. His daughter Hatshepsut (1504–1482 BC) was the princess who adopted Moses to be her son. Pharaoh Thutmose III (1504–1450 BC), who was for some time coregent with Hatshepsut, was the pharaoh of the Exodus.

The Exodus occurred, according to the best calculations, in March 1450 BC (see William H. Shea, "Exodus, Date of the," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al., vol. 2 [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982], pp. 230–238). To understand the time of the Exodus, study the following biblical texts: *Gen. 15:13–16*; *Exod. 12:40, 41*; *Judg. 11:26*; and *1 Kings 6:1* (see also *Acts 7:6*; *Gal. 3:16, 17*).

The first chapter of Exodus covers a long period—from the time of Joseph, when his father, Jacob, with the entire family entered Egypt, to Pharaoh's death decree. Though some debate exists over the exact number of years, what matters is that, even with His people enslaved in a foreign land, the Lord did not forget them.

That is, even though many details about the Hebrews in Egypt at that time remain hidden, at least for now (see *1 Cor. 13:12*), the revelation of God's character still shines through the pages of this book, as it does all through Scripture. We can know that no matter how bad things seem, God is always there, and we can trust Him in whatever bad situation we find ourselves.

The Hebrew Midwives

One cannot understand the book of Exodus without presupposing the teachings of Genesis. The Jews moved to Egypt, and, after a time of great prosperity and peace, they were enslaved.

But God did not abandon His people to their problems, even though it may sometimes have seemed so. No doubt many of the Hebrew people despaired of their plight. Yet, in the time of distress, God comes to help with His mighty hand. Our Lord encourages His followers: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (*Ps. 50:15, NKJV*).

Read Exodus 1:9–21. What key role did the faithful midwives play, and why are they remembered in history?

No pharaoh has a name in the book of Exodus. They carry the title of “Pharaoh” only, which means “king.” The Egyptians believed that the pharaoh was a god on earth, the son of the god Ra (or Osiris or Horus). Ra was considered the highest Egyptian deity, the sun god himself.

Yet despite all his power, this “god” was not able to force the midwives to go contrary to their convictions. In fact, in contrast to the nameless pharaoh, the two midwives are named, Shiprah and Puah (*Exod. 1:15*); they are highly esteemed because they feared the Lord. Pharaoh’s wicked command had no effect on them because they respected God more than the orders of an earthly ruler (*see also Acts 5:29*). Thus, God blessed them with their own large families. What a powerful testimony to faithfulness. These women, regardless of how little they knew of theology, knew not only what was right but chose to do what was right.

When Pharaoh saw that his plot had failed, he commanded the Egyptians to kill all the male babies born to the Hebrews. They were to throw them into the Nile River, probably as an offering to Hapi, the god of the Nile, and also a god of fertility. (This is the first recorded time that Jews are to be killed only because they are Jews.) The purpose of the death decree was to subdue the Hebrews, to annihilate all male descendants, and to assimilate the women into the Egyptian nation, thus ending the threat that Pharaoh believed the Hebrews posed to his nation.

The midwives not only knew what the right action was to take, but they took it. What’s the obvious message here for us?

Moses Is Born

Read Exodus 2:1–10. What role did God’s providence and protection play in Moses’ birth story?

The historical background of Moses’ birth and life is thrilling because he lived during the time of the famous Egyptian eighteenth dynasty. One king during this dynasty—Thutmose III, called the “Napoleon of Egypt”—is considered one of the most famous pharaohs of ancient Egypt.

Though under a death sentence at birth (*see Exod. 1:22*), Moses was born as a “special” son (*NLT*; Hebrew *tob*, lit. “good”; *Exod. 2:2*). The Hebrew term describes more than external beauty. This word is used, for example, in characterizing God’s work during Creation week, when He declared everything was “good,” even “very good” (*Gen. 1:4, 10, 31*).

As a new creation, this “good” child will, according to God’s plan, become the adult who will lead the Hebrews out of their bondage. At this baby’s birth, especially under such dire circumstances, who could have envisioned his future? Nevertheless, God will fulfill His words to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He covenanted with them that He would give their descendants the Promised Land (*Exod. 2:24, 25*). And, yes, He would use this *tob* infant, decades later, to do just that.

Until then, the Egyptian princess Hatshepsut adopted Moses as her son. The name given to Moses has an Egyptian origin, meaning “son of” or “born of,” as reflected in the names of Ah-mose (“son of Akh”) or Thut-mose (“son of Thoth”). His name is, thus, rendered in Hebrew as *Mosheh*, namely “drawn out.” His life was miraculously spared when he was “drawn out” of the river.

We know only a few things about his early life. After being miraculously saved and adopted by Hatshepsut, Moses lived for his first 12 years with his original family (*Exod. 2:7–9*; Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 244). Moses then received the best Egyptian education, all in order to prepare him to be the next pharaoh of Egypt (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 245). How fascinating that, ultimately, so much of this education would be useless for, or even work against, what really mattered: the knowledge of God and of His truth.

How much are you learning that is ultimately useless for what really matters?

A Change of Plans

Read Exodus 2:11–25. What events quickly transpired to change the entire direction of Moses’ life? What lessons can we learn from this story?

What would Moses do? Would he succumb to the lure of Egypt and to the pleasures of the court, or would he endure hardship with his embattled people? Events soon forced a decision for him.

“When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well” (*Exod. 2:15, NKJV*).

After the killing, Moses really had no choice, at least as far as remaining in Egypt. Thus, whatever plans there were for him to ascend to the throne of Egypt and to become a “god,” those plans were quickly ended. Rather than becoming a false god, Moses would serve the true God instead. No doubt, at the time when he fled, Moses had no idea what the future held for him.

“The whole matter [of Moses’ killing the Egyptian] was quickly made known to the Egyptians, and, greatly exaggerated, soon reached the ears of Pharaoh. It was represented to the king that this act meant much; that Moses designed to lead his people against the Egyptians, to overthrow the government, and to seat himself upon the throne; and that there could be no security for the kingdom while he lived. It was at once determined by the monarch that he should die; but, becoming aware of his danger, he [Moses] made his escape and fled toward Arabia.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 247.

Moses lived 120 years (*Deut. 34:7*), and his life can be divided into three parts of 40 years each. The first 40 years were in Egypt, much of them in the royal palace. The second 40 years he spent in Jethro’s house in the Midian territory.

It’s the last 40 years, however, that take up the bulk of the first five books of Moses (and this quarter), and they tell the story of Israel’s early calling to witness to a world steeped in idolatry, revealing the nature and character of the true God (*see Deut. 4:6–8*).

Was it God’s plan that Moses kill the Egyptian? If not, what does this story teach us about how God can overrule in any situation and use it for His own purposes? How does Romans 8:28 help us understand this important truth?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Moses,” pp. 241–251, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, which will give you significant insights into the studied portion of the biblical text for this week.

The biblical text states that “the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive” (*Exod. 1:17, NKJV*). Ellen G. White aptly comments on the faithfulness of the midwives and the Messianic hope: “Orders were issued to the women whose employment gave them opportunity for executing the command, to destroy the Hebrew male children at their birth. Satan was the mover in this matter. He knew that a deliverer was to be raised up among the Israelites; and by leading the king to destroy their children he hoped to defeat the divine purpose. But the women feared God, and dared not execute the cruel mandate. The Lord approved their course, and prospered them.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 242.

The good news in all this is that, despite Satan’s plans, God overruled, and He used faithful people to thwart the enemy. We do live in the territory of our enemy, whom Jesus called “the prince” or “ruler of this world” (*Eph. 2:2, NKJV; John 14:30*). Satan usurped this position from Adam, but Jesus Christ defeated him in His life and through His death on the cross (*Matt. 4:1–11, John 19:30, Heb. 2:14*). Although Satan is still alive and active, as revealed in his attempt to kill those children, his own execution is certain (*John 12:31; John 16:11; Rev. 20:9, 10, 14*). The good news is that life’s difficulties can be overcome by God’s grace (*Phil. 4:13*). That grace is our only hope.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Why did God allow the Hebrews to live in Egypt and be oppressed? Why did it take so long for God to intervene on their behalf? Remember, too, that each person suffered only as long as the person lived. That is, the time of suffering for the nation was long, but each person suffered only as long as that single person lived. Why is making that distinction important in seeking to understand human suffering in general?
- ② Dwell more on the questions regarding how God was able to use Moses’ hotheaded act of killing the Egyptian. Suppose he hadn’t done it? Would that have meant the Hebrews would not have eventually escaped from Egypt? Explain your reasoning.

No Rats for Lunch

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Peter Siamikobo enjoyed digging for rats in a mountainous village in Zambia. The boy and his family ate the rodents with maize-meal porridge at mealtime. They also enjoyed eating pigs and bubble fish. Pork was always on the table at Christmas. Bubble fish was popular for its boneless meat.

So, it came as a surprise to Peter when he learned that the Bible prohibited his favorite meats.

He heard about unclean food for the first time when he traveled about 20 miles from his hometown to visit a brother who was working at a farm operated by Seventh-day Adventist missionaries from the United States. He stayed for Sabbath worship services, and the preacher spoke about the clean and unclean animals of Leviticus 11. Peter realized that he and his family were following a meal plan that didn't match the Bible's teaching.

After a while, the missionaries began to hold worship services in Peter's elementary school on Sabbath afternoons. Peter attended the meetings, even though he had to walk two miles to reach the school.

His parents, however, discouraged him from going and reminded him that he had been baptized as a baby. Father even ordered him to work on the family farm on Saturdays. Peter didn't know anything about Sabbath observance, and he quickly did his work in the morning so he go to the afternoon meeting.

In high school, Peter made new friends from Adventist families. He studied the Bible with them and gave his heart to Jesus in baptism by immersion. He stopped eating rats, pork, and bubble fish.

Over time, his parents grew to appreciate the seventh-day Sabbath. They understood why he didn't eat unclean meat. Every Sabbath that he was at home, they encouraged him not to be late for Sabbath School.

Today, there is an Adventist church in Peter's town. Through the Adventist influence, many townspeople have stopped eating unclean food.

Peter is grateful that he learned as a boy about the importance of healthy living and glorifying God with his diet. After all, 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (NKJV).

"Thank Jesus for saving me from unclean food," said Peter, a church elder and head of the Social Sciences Department at Rusangu Secondary School, a Seventh-day Adventist high school, in Zambia.

Pray for the gospel to be proclaimed in Zambia and other countries in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, the recipient of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

The Burning Bush



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 18:3, 4; Exod. 3:1–22; Gen. 22:11, 15–18; Exod. 6:3; Joel 2:32; Exod. 4:1–31; Gen. 17:10, 11.*

Memory Text: “And the LORD said: ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey’ ” (*Exodus 3:7, 8, NKJV*).

God's call to us will often change the direction of our lives. However, if we follow that call, then we discover that God's path is always the best route for us. However, sometimes—at first—it isn't easy to accept God's call.

Such is the case for Moses and his call by God, which specifically began at the encounter with the Lord at the burning bush. Although Moses may or may not have known about the laws of combustion, he knew that what he was seeing was a miracle, and it certainly caught his attention. No question, the Lord was calling him to a specific task. The issue was: Would he answer the call, regardless of the radical new change in his life that this call would bring? At first, he was not very receptive to it.

You may recall instances when you had specific goals, but God redirected those plans. It is true that we can be useful to God in many ways, but following God's call in our lives, and doing what He leads us to do, is surely the path to the most satisfying existence. It might not always be easy, and it wasn't easy for Moses, but how foolish to go our own way when God is calling us in another direction.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 12.

The Burning Bush

After Moses fled to Midian, he had a relatively easy life. He married, had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer (*Exod. 18:3, 4*), and was part of the extended family of Jethro, his father-in-law and a priest in Midian. He spent 40 relaxed years being a shepherd, like David (*2 Sam. 7:8*), enjoying God's presence, especially as revealed in nature.

Yet, this time was not simply for Moses to smell the flowers (or perhaps, in this case, the desert cactus?). These years of walking with the Lord changed him and prepared him for a leadership role. God also used Moses in this quiet wilderness to write, under divine inspiration, two of the oldest biblical books: Job and Genesis (see Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 251; Francis D. Nichol, et al., eds., *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1140). Moses also received from God crucial insights about the great controversy, the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the patriarchs, and, most important, the plan of salvation. Thus, Moses was instrumental in passing on to all humanity the true knowledge of the living God, our Creator and Sustainer, and knowledge about what God is doing in view of the sin that has wreaked havoc on this planet. Biblical and salvation history make little sense apart from the crucial foundation that, under inspiration, Moses gave us, especially in the book of Genesis.

Read Exodus 3:1–6. What significance can be found in the fact that the Lord introduced Himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”?

Moses saw that the burning bush was not being consumed by the fire, and thus he knew that he was seeing a miracle and that something dramatic and important must be taking place right before him. As he moved closer, the Lord told him to take his shoes off as a sign of deep respect because God's presence made the place holy.

The Lord presented Himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (*Exod. 3:6*). The Lord had promised these patriarchs that their descendants would inherit Canaan, a promise Moses surely knew about. Thus, even before saying it, God was already opening the way for Moses to know what was coming and what crucial role he was to play.

Moses needed 80 years before God deemed him ready for his task. What might this truth teach us about patience?

The Angel of the Lord

“The angel of the LORD” appeared to Moses in flames of fire “from within a bush” (*Exod. 3:2, NIV*). It was the Lord Jesus Himself speaking to Moses “from within the bush” (*Exod. 3:4, NIV*).

Do not be confused with the title “angel of the LORD” as a depiction of Jesus Christ. The term *angel* itself simply means “messenger” (Hebrew *mal’akh*), and it always depends on the context whether this angel is to be interpreted as human or divine (*see Mal. 3:1*). There are many instances in the Bible where “the angel of the LORD” refers to the divine person (study, for example, *Gen. 22:11, 15–18; Gen. 31:3, 11, 13; Judg. 2:1, 2; Judg. 6:11–22; Zech. 3:1, 2*). This angel of the Lord not only speaks in the name of the Lord, but He is the Lord Himself. Jesus is God’s messenger to communicate the Father’s Word to us.

Read Exodus 3:7–12. How did God explain to Moses why He wanted to intervene on behalf of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt?

The suffering of God’s people in Egypt is colorfully described as a groaning and a deep cry for help. God heard their cry and was concerned (*Exod. 2:23–25*). He called them “my people” (*Exod. 3:7*). That is, even before Sinai and the ratifying of the covenant, they were His people, and He would cause them to dwell and prosper (if they would obey) in the land of Canaan, as He had promised their fathers.

God said to Moses that He was sending him to Pharaoh for a specific task: “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (*Exod. 3:10, NIV*). Again, God calls them “my people.”

What a task God presented to His servant! Moses, therefore, responded with a question: “Who am I?” That is, grasping the significance of what is going to happen and what his role is going to be in all this, Moses wonders why someone like himself would be chosen. Here, early on, we have an indication of his character, his humility, and his sense that he is unworthy of what he is being called to do.

Why is humility, and a sense of our own “unworthiness,” so important for anyone who seeks to follow the Lord and do anything for Him?

The Name of the Lord

Read Exodus 3:13–22. Why did Moses want to know God’s name, and what is the significance of His name?

God presents Himself to Moses as “’ehejeh ’asher ’ehejeh,” which literally means “I will be who I will be,” or “I am who I am.” In Exodus 3:12, God uses the same verb *’ehejeh* as in verse 14, when He states to Moses, “I will be” (with you). It means that God is eternal. He is the transcendent God, as well as the immanent God, and He dwells with those “who are contrite and humble in spirit” (*Isa. 57:15, NRSV*).

The proper name of God, “Yahweh” (translated in English Bibles usually as “the LORD”), was known to God’s people from the beginning, even if they didn’t know its deeper meaning. Moses also knew the name Yahweh, but, like others, he did not know the real meaning. His question, “What is your name?” is a query about that deeper meaning.

A helpful hint is in Exodus 6:3, where God stated: “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself fully known to them” (*Exod. 6:3, NIV*). It does not signify that Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the patriarchs did not know the name “Yahweh” (*see Gen. 2:4, 9; Gen. 4:1, 26; Gen. 7:5; Gen. 15:6–8; etc.*). It means, instead, that they did not know its deeper meaning.

His name, Yahweh, points to the fact that He is the personal God, the God of His people, the God of the covenant. He is a close, intimate God who intervenes in human affairs. The Almighty God (*Gen. 17:1*) is the God who miraculously intervened by His power. But Yahweh is a God who demonstrates His moral power by love and care. He is the same God as Elohim (“mighty, strong, transcendent God,” the “God of all people,” “the Ruler of the universe,” “the Creator of everything”), but different aspects of His relationship to humanity are revealed by the name Yahweh itself.

Knowing the name or calling on God’s name is not something magical. It is about a proclamation of His name, which means teaching others the truth concerning this God and the salvation that He offers to all who come in faith. As Joel says: “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved” (*Joel 2:32, NIV*).

In what ways in your own life have you experienced the closeness and intimacy with Yahweh that He seeks to have with all who are surrendered to Him?

Four Excuses

Read Exodus 4:1–17. What set of signs did God give to Moses to perform in order to strengthen his position as God’s messenger?

Moses again tried to excuse himself from the task God asked of him (*see Exod. 3:11*). He did not want to go to Egypt and confront Pharaoh. After all, he had already failed when he previously tried, on his own, to help the Hebrews. Also, his own people didn’t believe in or accept him as their leader. That’s why he formulated a third objection: “ ‘What if they do not believe me or listen to me?’ ” (*Exod. 4:1, NIV*). This was not a question to learn something new; it was an attempt to say no to the responsibility that God asked him to undertake.

Two miraculous signs are given to Moses to perform before the elders of Israel and, later, before Pharaoh: (1) his staff turning into a snake and then back into a staff, and (2) his hand becoming leprous but then instantly healed. Both miracles should convince the elders that God is at work for them. But if not, the third miracle, that of turning water into blood, was added (*Exod. 4:8, 9*).

Although God gave Moses these mighty wonders, he still expresses another excuse, the fourth: he is not a good speaker.

Read Exodus 4:10–18. How does the Lord respond to Moses, and what lessons can we take from that for ourselves, in whatever situation we believe God calls us to?

This set of four excuses shows Moses’ reluctance to follow God’s call. With “reasonable” objections, he masks his unwillingness to go. The first three excuses are in the form of questions: (1) Who am I? (2) Who are You? and (3) What if they do not believe me? And the fourth objection is (4) the statement: “I am not eloquent.” God reacted to all of them and brought a powerful solution. To these excuses God presents many uplifting promises.

Then Moses delivers his fifth and final plea and directly asks: “ ‘O my Lord, please send someone else’ ” (*Exod. 4:13, NRSV*). In response, God tells him that He is already sending his brother, Aaron, to meet him for support. Finally, Moses silently concedes and asks Jethro for his blessing before departing for Egypt.

The Circumcision

Read Exodus 4:18–31. How do we understand this strange story, and what lesson can we take from it?

Bible students are shocked when they read that, after Moses obeyed the Lord and started his journey back to Egypt, the Lord “was about to kill him” (*Exod. 4:24, NIV*). From the context of the story, it is evident that the issue was circumcision. His youngest son was not circumcised, as the Abrahamic covenant demanded (*Gen. 17:10, 11*).

Moses, as the leader of God’s people, needed to show his perfect submission and obedience to God, in order to be qualified to lead other people to be obedient. He had to be a model of that total surrender to God. His wife, Zipporah, was a woman of action and circumcised her son in order to save the life of her husband. She touched Moses with the “bloody foreskin,” and this blood represents atonement, life, and the sealing of the covenant. The fact that it was done so quickly added to the drama of the situation.

An important lesson can be learned from this episode: never fail to do what we know is right.

“On the way from Midian, Moses received a startling and terrible warning of the Lord’s displeasure. An angel appeared to him in a threatening manner, as if he would immediately destroy him. No explanation was given; but Moses remembered that he had disregarded one of God’s requirements . . . he had neglected to perform the rite of circumcision upon their youngest son. He had failed to comply with the condition by which his child could be entitled to the blessings of God’s covenant with Israel; and such a neglect on the part of their chosen leader could not but lessen the force of the divine precepts upon the people. Zipporah, fearing that her husband would be slain, performed the rite herself, and the angel then permitted Moses to pursue his journey. In his mission to Pharaoh, Moses was to be placed in a position of great peril; his life could be preserved only through the protection of holy angels. But while living in neglect of a known duty, he would not be secure; for he could not be shielded by the angels of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 255, 256.

What should this story say to you if you are indeed guilty of neglecting what you know you should be doing? What changes do you need to make, even right now?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Moses,” pp. 251–256, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

The dramatic burning bush call was probably the most transformative experience in Moses’ life. All other high points in his life depended on his positive, obedient response to God’s commissioning him to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and to the Promised Land.

Sure, we know now how it all turned out. But put yourself in Moses’ place at the time of the burning bush. He had fled from Egypt to save his life. A new generation of Hebrews had come on the scene over the 40 years, many of whom probably knew little about him, or maybe even what they heard about him was wrong, filtered through stories that over time get distorted. *And yet now, he was called by God to lead this same people away from a powerful nation?* No wonder he was reluctant at first!

Yes, it was an extremely demanding task, but imagine what he would have missed if he had given a final no to God. He might have just disappeared into history instead of—through the power of God working in him—literally making history and becoming one of the greatest and most influential people, not just in the Bible but in the world itself.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In the quiet years spent in the desert, Moses did what God called him to do: he was a family man, took care of sheep, and wrote two biblical books under God’s inspiration before he was called to be a great leader of God’s people. What does Moses’ experience teach us about our duties in life?
- ② One could argue that, on the surface, Moses’ excuses were, in and of themselves, pretty reasonable, were they not? *Why should the people believe me? Who am I to begin with? I can’t speak well.* What should this story tell us about how to learn to trust that God can enable us to do what He calls us to do?
- ③ Dwell more on the point made in Sunday’s study about Moses’ authorship of the book of Genesis and how important that work is to understanding sacred history and the plan of salvation. Why must we fight against every attempt (and there are many) to weaken the authority of the book, especially by denying the historicity of, particularly, the first 11 chapters?

A Transformed Mind

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Mitch, a tough gang member, got into a brawl with several other Native Americans in the US state of Washington. He suffered a significant head injury, and doctors said he would never work again.

Then his younger brother, Stephan, invited him to the All Nations Center Adventist Church in Wapato, Washington. Stephan worshiped every Sabbath at the church with their mother and sister.

Mitch didn't want to go, and he went unwillingly to the church on Sabbath. But then he went again and again. He immersed himself in the Bible, spurred on by the hope that it could heal his mind. He clung to Romans 12:2, which says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (NKJV). He embraced Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

Church leader Jeff Weijohn encouraged him, saying, "The Word of God promises that it will change your mind if you study it."

Mitch began to see Bible promises fulfilled. Doctors who had said he would never work again were surprised to see him get a job and keep it.

After Bible studies, Mitch gave his heart to Jesus and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Then he became a Bible worker and started teaching the Bible to others. He and his wife opened their home to young people who needed a place to stay. Anyone was welcome if they followed the house rules. One rule was that everyone went to church on Sabbath.

The lives of their houseguests also began to change.

One young person joyfully told Jeff on Sabbath, "You know what? When you told us about the Bible, we didn't want to listen to you at all. But now we want to study the Bible."

Jeff said the change in Mitch's life was revolutionary.

"When he accepted God into his life, people didn't recognize him anymore," he said. "He came from being a person who was very hard and brain damaged to being a person able to minister. Many young people have been touched by him. God works through us despite ourselves."



An outreach program to Native Americans in Wapato and the surrounding region of Washington state got its start with the help of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 1990. A highlight of the program is the All Nations Center Adventist Church, pictured, which opened in 2001.

Rough Start



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 5:1–23, Rev. 11:8, Exod. 6:1–13, Ps. 73:23–26, 2 Cor. 6:16, Exod. 6:28–7:7.*

Memory Text: “Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel: “Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.” ’ And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.’ ” (*Exodus 5:1, 2, NKJV*).

Many believers think that when one decides to follow God, he or she will experience only happiness, prosperity, and success. That's not necessarily the case, however, as the Bible itself often shows. Sometimes many obstacles appear, as well as new difficulties. This can be very frustrating, and it prompts hard questions that don't always have easy answers or, it seems, any answers at all.

Those who trust in God will face numerous trials. When we persevere, however, God brings solutions that come on His terms and in His time. His ways may conflict with our expectations for quick and instantaneous solutions, but we must learn to trust Him regardless.

Thus, the topic for this week: Moses and the command to lead God's people out of Egypt—about as clear a call from God as anyone could have. Indeed, it included miracles, as well as God Himself speaking directly to Moses and letting him know exactly what He wanted Moses to do.

How much easier, then, could it have been for Moses, knowing that he had been called by God and even given a specific task?

It should have been simple then, right?

Read on.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 19.

Who Is the Lord?

Following God's orders, Moses goes to Pharaoh to begin the process in which he, Moses, would "bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (*Exod. 3:10, NKJV*).

What was Pharaoh's response to God's demand, "Let my people go" (*see Exod. 5:1, 2*), and what significance can be found in this response?

"Who is the LORD?" Pharaoh declares, not in any desire to know Him but, instead, as an act of defiance or even denial of this God, whom he admits that he does not know. " 'I do not know the LORD' " (*NKJV*), he says, almost as a boast.

How many people throughout history have uttered the same thing? How tragic, because, as Jesus Himself said, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (*John 17:3*).

Egypt, with the pharaoh as king, is symbolic of a power that denies God's presence and authority. It is an entity that stands in opposition to God, His Word, and His people.

Pharaoh's next declaration that "I will not let Israel go" reveals even more this rebellion against the living God, further making Egypt a symbol, not only for the denial of God but for a system that fights against Him.

No wonder many saw this same attitude, millennia later, in the French Revolution (*see also Isa. 30:1–3 and Rev. 11:8*). Pharaoh thought he was a god or the son of a god—a broad reference to a belief in one's own supreme power, strength, and intelligence.

"Of all nations presented in Bible history, Egypt most boldly denied the existence of the living God and resisted His commands. No monarch ever ventured upon more open and highhanded rebellion against the authority of Heaven than did the king of Egypt. When the message was brought him by Moses, in the name of the Lord, Pharaoh proudly answered: 'Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto His voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go,' Exodus 5:2, A.R.V. This is atheism, and the nation represented by Egypt would give voice to a similar denial of the claims of the living God and would manifest a like spirit of unbelief and defiance."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 269.

If someone asked, *Do you know the Lord?* How would you respond? If yes, what would you say He is like, and why?

A Rough Start

Though Moses must have known, even from the beginning, that what the Lord had tasked him with was not going to be easy (hence his attempts to get out of it), he probably had no idea of what was coming.

Read Exodus 5:3–23. What were the immediate results of Moses and Aaron’s first recorded encounter with Pharaoh?

Even before going to Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron gathered the elders and people of Israel, told them God’s words, and showed them God’s signs, which resulted in Israel’s believing that the Lord would deliver them from their slavery. Thus, they worshiped the Lord (*Exod. 4:29–31*). Expectations surely were high: the Lord was going to deliver the Hebrew people from their bondage—finally!

Moses then went to the king of Egypt with God’s demands, and things became even worse for the Israelites. Their suffering increased, and their daily labor became more burdensome and demanding. They were accused of being lazy; they were treated more harshly; and their service became more difficult than it had already been.

Their leaders were not happy, and the confrontation between them and Moses and Aaron was ugly, and (as we will later see) it simply portended the kind of conflicts Moses would have with his own people for years to come.

Read Exodus 5:21, and then put yourself in the place of these men as they confronted Moses and Aaron. Why would they say what they did?

It’s not that hard to see why they would have been upset with Moses (“ ‘Let the LORD look on you and judge,’ ” they said). They thought Moses was coming to free them from the Egyptians, not to make their lives under the Egyptians even harder.

Thus, besides dealing with the Egyptians, Moses and Aaron had to deal with their own people, as well.

What are some better ways you and others might be able to deal with local church leaders when disagreements arise, as they inevitably do?

The Divine “I”

Poor Moses! He first gets berated by Pharaoh, and now his own people all but curse him.

Thus, Moses brings his complaint to God. In his bitterness and disappointment with the worsening of Israel’s conditions, he asks: “ ‘Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all’ ” (*Exod. 5:22, 23, NIV*). Moses’ discontent with the Lord is obvious and, considering the situation, understandable.

God’s response, though, is powerful. He will act, and very decisively, as well. “ ‘Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh’ ” (*Exod. 6:1, NIV*).

Read Exodus 5:22–6:8. What is God’s response to Moses, and what important theological truths are revealed here?

God will no longer only speak; He will now mightily intervene in favor of His people. He reminds Moses of a few pertinent facts: (1) “I am the LORD”; (2) I appeared to the patriarchs; (3) I established My covenant with them; (4) I have promised to give them the land of Canaan; (5) I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel; and (6) I have remembered My covenant to give you the Promised Land.

Notice the repetition of the divine “I.” I, “*the LORD your God*,” I *have done such and such, and so you can trust that I will do for you what I have promised*.

The Lord now solemnly proclaims that He will do four great things for Israel because He is their living Lord: (1) “ ‘I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians;’ ” (2) “ ‘I will free you from being slaves to them;’ ” (3) “ ‘I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment;’ ” and (4) “ ‘I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God’ ” (*Exod. 6:6, 7, NIV*).

These four divine actions secure and reestablish His relationship with His people. God is the subject of all these activities, and the Israelites are the recipients of all these benefits and grace. God offers these gifts for free, out of love; He did it then, to them, and He does it now, for us, as well.

What other Bible characters have cried out in complaint before God—and with good reasons? Why is it OK, at times, to pour out your soul to God and even complain about your situation? Why, though, must you always do it in faith and in trust?

Uncircumcised Lips

The Lord had indeed given Moses some powerful promises about what He was going to do. Though that encounter must have encouraged Moses, his encouragement was probably short-lived, given the response that he received from his people.

Read Exodus 6:9–13. What happened next, and what lessons can we take from this story about times of disappointment and struggle in our lives?

The Hebrews are so disheartened by their grief, suffering, and hard labor that they do not listen to Moses' words of reassurance that God will act to fulfill what He promised. They have waited so long for it, and their expectations have not been met. Why should it be different now? They were losing heart and hope, which must have been even more bitter because, perhaps for the first in all their lifetimes, they saw real hope of deliverance.

And yet, who hasn't been in a similar place? Who hasn't at some point felt depressed, disappointed, dissatisfied—even abandoned by God?

Remember the story of Job? What about Asaph, a psalmist who struggled with his questions regarding the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous? Yet, regardless of his struggles, Asaph has one of the most beautiful confessions of faith: "Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (*Ps. 73:23–26, NIV*).

Through sacred history, God has assured His people that He is with them (*Isa. 41:13, Matt. 28:20*). He gives them His peace, His comfort, and He strengthens them to make it through life's challenges (*John 14:27; John 16:33; Phil. 4:6, 7*).

The covenant formula, "I will take you as My people, and I will be your God" (*Exod. 6:7, NKJV*), expresses the intimate relationship that the Lord wanted to have with His people.

Think through the phrase "I will take you as My people, and I will be your God" (*Exod. 6:7, NKJV*). Though the context was corporate, how does this apply to each one of us individually, and how should this relationship be manifested in our daily lives? (See also 2 Cor. 6:16.)

Like God to Pharaoh

Read Exodus 6:28–7:7. How does the Lord deal with Moses’ objection?

God presents Himself to Moses as Yahweh, which means that He is the personal and close God, the God of His people, and the God who entered a covenantal relationship with them.

This immanent God again commands Moses to go and speak with Pharaoh. With a lack of self-confidence, Moses again objects: “Why would Pharaoh listen to me?” Here again we can see not just Moses’ humility but, again, his desire to get out of the task, which so far has not gone too well.

“When God ordered Moses to go back to Pharaoh, Moses showed self-distrust. The term *‘aral sepatayim*—literally ‘uncircumcised lips,’ which is used here to express Moses’ lack of speaking ability (6:12, 30)—is similar to that found in Exodus 4:10: ‘slow of speech.’ ”—*Andrews Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, “Exodus” (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), p. 205.

God in His mercy gives Aaron to help Moses. Moses will speak to Aaron, who will then speak publicly to Pharaoh; thus, Moses will play the role of God before the Egyptian king, and Aaron will be his prophet.

This account provides an excellent definition for the role of a prophet. A prophet is a spokesperson for God; he or she is His mouthpiece to transmit and to interpret God’s word to the people. As Moses spoke to Aaron, and then Aaron announced it to Pharaoh, so God communicates with a prophet, who then proclaims God’s teaching to the people. This can happen verbally, in person; or, as was most commonly done, the prophet received the message from God and then wrote it down.

God also explains to Moses what he can expect from the encounters with Pharaoh. He warns him that the confrontation will be tense and long. For the second time God stresses to Moses that Pharaoh will be very stubborn and that He will harden his heart (*Exod. 4:21, Exod. 7:3*). The result, however, will end in something good, for “‘the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD’ ” (*Exod. 7:5, NIV*). That is, even amid the chaos that follows, God will be glorified.

Moses ran out of excuses for not following what God had called him to do. What excuses might we use to try to get out of what we know God wants us to do?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Plagues of Egypt,” pp. 257–265, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Look at how badly things started off for Moses and his people after Moses first approached Pharaoh.

“The king, thoroughly roused, suspected the Israelites of a design to revolt from his service. Disaffection was the result of idleness; he would see that no time was left them for dangerous scheming. And he at once adopted measures to tighten their bonds and crush out their independent spirit. The same day orders were issued that rendered their labor still more cruel and oppressive. The most common building material of that country was sun-dried brick; the walls of the finest edifices were made of this, and then faced with stone; and the manufacture of brick employed great numbers of the bondmen. Cut straw being intermixed with the clay, to hold it together, large quantities of straw were required for the work; the king now directed that no more straw be furnished; the laborers must find it for themselves, while the same amount of brick should be exacted.

“This order produced great distress among the Israelites throughout the land. The Egyptian taskmasters had appointed Hebrew officers to oversee the work of the people, and these officers were responsible for the labor performed by those under their charge. When the requirement of the king was put in force, the people scattered themselves throughout the land, to gather stubble instead of straw; but they found it impossible to accomplish the usual amount of labor. For this failure the Hebrew officers were cruelly beaten.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 258.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Think of a time that, as you heeded God’s call in your life, things did not go well, or certainly did not start off well. What lessons have you learned over time from that experience?
- ❷ Tell others how God intervened in your life when you prayed for His help or when you did not expect it. How can we believe in God’s goodness when bad things happen, even to those who trust the Lord?
- ❸ What would you say to someone who declares, “I do not know the Lord”? However, suppose the person said it, not in a way of defiance, but as a simple fact about his or her life? What could you do to help him or her know the Lord and explain to the person why it’s important that he or she do so?

Monkeys or Church?

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Monkeys threatened to destroy the crops of a family farm in Mozambique. António Cuchata received strict orders from his father to keep the monkeys away. However, António didn't want to guard the farm on Sabbath. He recently had given his heart to Jesus in baptism, and he wanted to spend the Sabbath worshipping in a Seventh-day Adventist church.

What would António do? He prayed and went to church.

Vervet monkeys were a severe problem for small farmers in the coastal province where António and his family lived in southeastern Africa. The monkeys, with black faces and gray body hair, stood at 16 to 20 inches tall. Tribes of 10 to 70 monkeys raided small farms for cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, peanuts, and other crops.

Father worried that the family wouldn't have food or income if the monkeys decimated their crops. He also didn't approve of his son going to the Adventist church. He had raised António in another faith, and he didn't understand why the boy wanted to worship on the seventh day, Sabbath. Father didn't mind skipping worship services on Sunday to watch the farm, and he told António that he also should help on Saturdays.

António loved Father. He hadn't planned to become a Seventh-day Adventist, but an Adventist cousin had studied the Bible with him. He had grown convinced that he needed to follow what he had learned, including the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work" (*Exod. 20:8-10, NKJV*).

So, António knelt and prayed, "Dear God, please stop the monkeys from coming to our farm while I am at church." Then he went to the Adventist church in Casa-Nova, located about 15 miles from the farm.

António wasn't sure what to expect when he returned home. To his joy, the monkeys stayed away all day. He prayed and went to church the next Sabbath, and again the monkeys did not come near the farm. Every



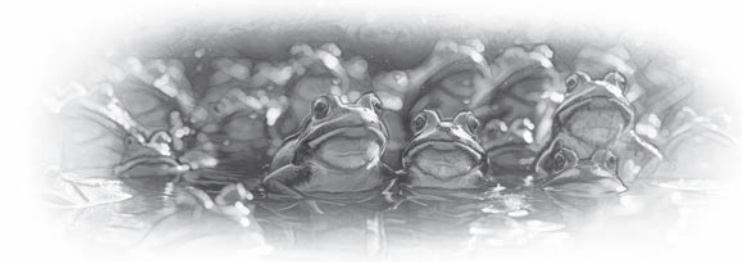
Sabbath while António lived at home, the monkeys avoided the farm while he worshiped at the church.

Father refused to acknowledge the miracle, but António was filled with gratitude to God. Even today, years later, he still marvels at God's care.

"The monkeys also kept the Sabbath," he said.

Pray for the gospel to be proclaimed in Mozambique and other countries in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, the recipient of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

The Plagues



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 7:8–10:29; Num. 33:4; Rom. 1:24–32; Ps. 104:27, 28; Isa. 28:2, 12–17; Isa. 44:9, 10, 12–17.*

Memory Text: “So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the LORD had spoken by Moses” (*Exodus 9:35, NKJV*).

A farmer was trying to get his donkey to move; the beast wouldn't budge. So, the farmer took a thick branch and walloped it. He again spoke to the donkey, who then started moving.

When someone asked the farmer why that worked, he replied, “Well, first you have to get its attention.”

Putting aside whatever issue one might raise about cruelty to animals, there is a point to be made here, especially in the context of the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt. Moses has been given his marching orders and goes to Pharaoh with God's famous words, *shalach et ami*, which is, “Let My people go!”

Pharaoh, however, does not want to let God's people go. The Scriptures never explicitly explain why Pharaoh was so reluctant, despite the military threat that the Egyptians feared the Hebrews could pose (*see Exod. 1:10*). Most likely, as is often the case with slavery, it was pure economics. They were cheap labor, and so he didn't want to lose whatever economic advantages these slaves gave him. Thus, he was going to need some persuasion not only to get his attention but also to change his mind.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 26.

God vs. gods

Read Exodus 7:8–15. What lessons are here in this first confrontation between the God of the Hebrews and the gods of Egypt?

The upcoming battles were going to be between the living God and the Egyptian “gods.” What made things worse was that Pharaoh considered himself to be one of those gods. The Lord did not fight against the Egyptians, or even Egypt per se, but against their deities (the Egyptians venerated more than 1,500 gods and goddesses). The biblical text is explicit: “On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD” (*Exod. 12:12, ESV*). Later, it is once again emphasized, this time when Israel’s journey from Egypt was recounted: “The LORD had brought judgment on their gods” (*Num. 33:4, NIV*).

An example of this judgment on their gods was well demonstrated by the miracle of the rod turning into a serpent (*Exod. 7:9–12*). In Egypt, the Uraeus goddess Wadjet was personified by a cobra and represented sovereign power over lower Egypt. The symbol of a cobra appeared in Pharaoh’s crown, a sign of his power, deity, royalty, and divine authority, because this goddess would spit venom at Pharaoh’s enemies. The Egyptians also believed that the sacred serpent would guide the Pharaoh to his afterlife.

When Aaron’s staff became a snake and ate all the other serpents before the king, the supremacy of the living God over Egyptian magic and sorcery was manifested. Not only was the emblem of Pharaoh’s might conquered, but Aaron and Moses clutched it in their hands (*Exod. 7:12, 15*). The initial confrontation demonstrated God’s power and lordship over Egypt. Moses, as God’s representative, had greater authority and power than did the “god” Pharaoh himself.

It is also significant that the ancient Egyptians considered a snake god, Nehebkau (“he who harnesses the spirits”), to be sacred, adored, and worshiped. According to their mythology, this serpent god had great power because he swallowed seven cobras. Thus, God communicated to the Egyptians that He, not the serpent god, has sovereign power and authority. After such a powerful confrontation, they were able to understand this message immediately and distinctly.

How can we allow the Lord to have sovereignty over any of the “gods” seeking supremacy in our lives?

Who Hardened Pharaoh's Heart?

Read Exodus 7:3, 13, 14, 22. How do we understand these texts?

Nine times in Exodus the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is ascribed to God (*Exod. 4:21; Exod. 7:3; Exod. 9:12; Exod. 10:1, 20, 27; Exod. 11:10; Exod. 14:4, 8; see also Rom. 9:17, 18*). Another nine times Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart (*Exod. 7:13, 14, 22; Exod. 8:15, 19, 32; Exod. 9:7, 34, 35*).

Who hardened the king's heart—God, or Pharaoh himself?

It is significant that in the Exodus story of the ten plagues, in each of the first five plagues, Pharaoh alone was the agent of his heart hardening. Thus, he initiated the hardening of his own heart. From the sixth plague on, however, the biblical text states that it was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart (*Exod. 9:12*). What all this means is that God *strengthened or deepened Pharaoh's own choice, his willful action, as God had told Moses He would do* (*Exod. 4:21*).

In other words, God sent plagues to help Pharaoh repent and to free him from the darkness and error of his mind. God did not create fresh evil in Pharaoh's heart; instead, He simply gave Pharaoh over to his own malign impulses. He left him without God's restraining grace and thus abandoned him to his own wickedness (*see Rom. 1:24–32*).

Pharaoh had his free will—he could choose for or against God—and he decided against.

The lessons are obvious. We have been given the ability to choose between right and wrong, good and evil, obedience or disobedience. From Lucifer in heaven, to Adam and Eve in Eden, to Pharaoh in Egypt, and to us today—wherever we abide, we choose either life or death (*Deut. 30:19*).

An analogy: imagine sunshine that beats on butter and clay. Butter melts but clay hardens. The heat of the sun is the same in both cases, but there are two different reactions to the heat, and two different results. The effect depends on the material. In the case of Pharaoh, one may say that it depended upon the attitudes of his heart toward God and His people.

What freewill choice(s) are you going to make in the next day or so? If you know what the right choice is, how can you prepare yourself to make it?

The First Three Plagues

The ten plagues in Egypt were aimed not at the Egyptian people but at their gods. Each plague hit at least one of them.

Read Exodus 7:14–8:19. What happened in these plagues?

God instructed Moses that the dialogue with Pharaoh would be difficult and almost impossible (*Exod. 7:14*). However, God wanted to reveal Himself to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians. Thus, He decided to communicate with them in a way that they could understand. Also, the Hebrews would benefit from this confrontation because they would learn more about their God.

The first plague was aimed against Hapi, the god of the Nile (*Exod. 7:17–25*). Life in Egypt was totally dependent on water from the Nile. Where there was water, there was life. Water was the source of life, so they invented their god Hapi and worshiped him as the provider of life.

Of course, only the living God is the Source of life, the Creator of everything, including water and food (*Gen. 1:1, 2, 20–22; Ps. 104:27, 28; Ps. 136:25; John 11:25; John 14:6*). Changing water into blood symbolizes transforming life into death. Hapi was not able to provide and protect life. These are possible only through the power of the Lord.

God then gives Pharaoh another chance. This time the frog goddess, Heqet, is directly confronted (*Exod. 8:1–15*). Instead of life, the Nile produces frogs, which the Egyptians fear, detest, and abhor. They want to get rid of them. The precise time when this plague was taken away demonstrated that God's power was also behind this plague.

The third plague has the shortest description (*Exod. 8:16–19*). The type of insect here (Heb. *kinnim*) is not clear (gnats, mosquitoes, ticks, lice?). It was directed against the god Geb, the Egyptian god of the earth. Out of the dust of the earth (echoes of the biblical Creation story) God brought forth gnats, which spread throughout the land. Unable to duplicate this miracle (only God can create life), the magicians declared, "This is the finger of God" (*Exod. 8:19*). Pharaoh, however, still refused to budge.

Think how hard Pharaoh's heart was. Repeated rejection of God's prompting only made it worse. What lessons are here for each of us about the constant rejection of the Lord's prompting?

Flies, Livestock, and Boils

Read Exodus 8:20–9:12. What does this account teach about however great may be the manifestations of God’s power and glory, humanity still has freedom to reject Him?

The Egyptian god Uatchit was the fly god and of swamps and marshes. The god Khepri (of the rising sun, creation, and rebirth) was depicted with the head of a scarab beetle. These “gods” were defeated by the Lord. In this account (*Exod. 8:20–24*), while the Egyptians were suffering, the Hebrews were protected. In fact, no further plagues affected them.

Again, all this was an attempt by God to let Pharaoh know that “ ‘I am the LORD in the midst of the land’ ” (*Exod. 8:22, NKJV*).

Thus, Pharaoh began to bargain. No doubt the pressure was mounting. He was willing for Israel to worship their God and to sacrifice to Him, but only in the land of Egypt (*Exod. 8:25*). His conditions could not be met because some of the animals were considered sacred in Egypt, and sacrificing them would have caused violence against the Hebrews. Also, this was not God’s plan for Israel.

Meanwhile, the next plague (*Exod. 9:1–7*) falls on the livestock. Hathor, the Egyptian goddess of love and protection, was depicted with the head of a cow. A bull god Apis was also very popular and highly regarded in ancient Egypt. Thus, in this fifth plague, additional principal deities were defeated when the Egyptians’ livestock died.

In the sixth plague (*Exod. 9:8–12*), the total defeat of Isis, the goddess of medicine, magic, and wisdom, is made manifest. We also see the defeat of such deities as Sekhmet (goddess of war and epidemics) and Imhotep (god of medicine and healing). They are unable to protect their own worshipers. Ironically, now even the magicians and sorcerers are so afflicted that they cannot appear in court, which shows that they are helpless against the Creator of heaven and earth.

For the first time in the story about the ten plagues, a text says that “the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (*Exod. 9:12, NIV*). However confusing this phrase might be, when understood in the full context, it reveals again that the Lord will let us reap the consequences of our own continual rejection of Him.

Pharaoh’s problem wasn’t intellectual; he had enough rational evidence to make the right choice. Instead, it was a problem of his heart. What should this tell us about why we must guard our hearts?

Hail, Locusts, and Darkness

Read Exodus 9:13–10:29. How successful are these plagues in getting Pharaoh to change his mind?

Nut was the Egyptian goddess of the sky and heavens and was often depicted as controlling what happened under the sky and on the earth. Osiris was the god of crops and fertility. In the Bible, hail is often associated with God's judgment (*Isa. 28:2, 17; Ezek. 13:11–13*). During this plague, those who hide their property in a safe shelter will be protected (*Exod. 9:20, 21*). Everyone is now tested: will they, or will they not, believe God's Word and act accordingly?

God announces that His purpose in letting Pharaoh live is for the whole earth to know Him (*Exod. 9:16*). The king of Egypt now confesses that he has sinned, but later he changes his mind.

The Egyptian god of storm, war, and disorder was called Seth. Together with Isis, they were considered agriculture deities. Shu was a god of the atmosphere. Serapis personified divine majesty, fertility, healing, and afterlife. Not one of the Egyptian gods could stop God's judgments (*Exod. 10:4–20*) because idols are nothing (*Isa. 44:9, 10, 12–17*).

Pharaoh's servants urged him to let Israel go, but he refused again. He offered a compromise, which Moses rightly rejected because women and children are a vital and inseparable part of worship and the faith community.

Finally, Ra was the principal Egyptian god, the sun god. Thoth was a moon god. Neither was able to give light. Pharaoh again tries to bargain, but in vain. A three-day period of darkness struck Egypt, but there was light where the Israelites lived. The separation could not be more spectacular.

Yet, no matter the battering that his nation took, Pharaoh was determined to fight back and not to relent. Though we don't know his deeper motives, at some point it could have become purely a pride thing. No matter how powerful the evidence, no matter how obvious it was what was happening (even his own servants declared, " 'How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?' " [*Exod. 10:7, NKJV*]), and no matter that the correct choice was right there before him—after a bit of waffling, Pharaoh still refused to surrender to God's will and let the people go.

What a dramatic example of the words "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (*Prov. 16:18, NKJV*).

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Plagues of Egypt,” pp. 265–272, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“His [God’s] people were permitted to experience the grinding cruelty of the Egyptians, that they might not be deceived concerning the debasing influence of idolatry. In His dealing with Pharaoh, the Lord manifested His hatred of idolatry and His determination to punish cruelty and oppression. . . . There was no exercise of supernatural power to harden the heart of the king. God gave to Pharaoh the most striking evidence of divine power, but the monarch stubbornly refused to heed the light. Every display of infinite power rejected by him, rendered him the more determined in his rebellion. The seeds of rebellion that he sowed when he rejected the first miracle, produced their harvest.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 268.

“The sun and moon were objects of worship to the Egyptians; in this mysterious darkness the people and their gods alike were smitten by the power that had undertaken the cause of the bondmen. Yet fearful as it was, this judgment is an evidence of God’s compassion and His unwillingness to destroy. He would give the people time for reflection and repentance before bringing upon them the last and most terrible of the plagues.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 272.

Discussion Questions:

① Dwell more on the question of why Pharaoh allowed himself to be so hardened that, in the face of what must have been the obvious and correct choice—*Let the people go!*—he still refused. How could someone become so self-deceived? What kind of warnings should we take from this for ourselves about how we can truly get so hardened in sin that we make utterly disastrous decisions when the correct decision and the right path have been right before us the whole time? What other Bible characters have made the same kind of error? Think, for example, of Judas.

② At one point, amid the devastation that Pharaoh had brought upon his own land and people, he declared, “ ‘I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones’ ” (*Exod. 9:27, NASB*). Though a wonderful confession of sin at the time, how do we know that it wasn’t a genuine one?

Strange and Silent World

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

No one in town had ever converted to Christianity, and townspeople burned with anger when Kokila's father and four other families decided to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Kokila was nine, and her life changed forever.

Kokila's mother had died when she was a baby, and she lived with her father, four older sisters, and an older brother in southern Asia.

Father, an impoverished farmer, was barred from working in the field after he started to keep the Sabbath. He and the other Sabbath keepers also were forbidden from buying food in shops.

In addition, town leaders announced that anyone who spoke to the Sabbath keepers would have to pay a large fine.

As a result, neighbors refused to talk to Kokila and her family. Kokila also didn't talk to her neighbors. Nobody wanted to pay the fine. Kokila had had many friends, and she lost them all. It was a strange and silent world for the girl.

When Father refused to give up his faith, the neighbors turned violent. They angrily swooped down on Kokila's home, scooping up furniture, clothing, and dishes, and dumping them on the street. They also beat her father and brother.

One neighbor, however, proved to be a bright light during that dark time. He also wasn't a Christian, but he didn't belong to the same major world religion that the townspeople did. He helped Kokila's family to buy rice. He talked to Kokila, and he willingly paid the fine for violating town rules.

For seven years, Kokila lived in horrible circumstances. Three of the families who had accepted the Sabbath at the same time as Kokila's father changed their minds and left the church. Only two of the five families, including Kokila's family, remained faithful to God.

Kokila never complained, but she cried a lot. Father saw her tears, and he decided to send her to an Adventist boarding school. It was like a piece of heaven on earth for the girl.



"The teachers were very kind and loving," recalled Kokila, who today is 39 and works as a secretary at the boarding school, E. D. Thomas Memorial Higher Secondary School in Thanjavur, India. "The teachers spoke to me! The children spoke to me! It was so nice to have friends again."

Thank you for your mission offerings, which support Seventh-day Adventist schools around the world. E. D. Thomas Memorial Higher Secondary School received part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2020.

Passover



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 11:1–10, Mic. 6:8, Exod. 12:1–30, 1 Cor. 5:7, Exod. 13:14–16, Heb. 11:28.*

Memory Text: “‘And it shall be, when your children say to you, “What do you mean by this service?” that you shall say, “It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households”’ ” (*Exodus 12:26, 27, NKJV*).

The tenth and last plague is about to fall. The last warning is given; the final decision must be made. It's truly a matter of life or death. Not only the life of an individual but the prosperity of families and the entire nation is at stake. Pharaoh and his officials will be responsible for the fate of many people, either for life or for death. Pharaoh's attitude toward the living God of Israel will determine not just his future but that of his nation.

How do we feel, and what do we do, when the gravity of circumstances lies heavy upon us and we have to choose the next step and direction, a choice that can greatly impact the lives of many others besides ourselves?

God is more than willing to grant us wisdom, understanding, and power to do what is right (*1 Cor. 1:30, Phil. 2:13*).

The problem, however, is that, in our own stubborn hearts, we don't always want to do what is right. We know what it is, but we refuse to do it. In the account of the Exodus, one man's refusal to submit to God, even in face of overwhelming evidence, brought tragedy upon many others besides himself, which is often how it works, anyway.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 2.

One More Plague

The prophet Amos declares that “ ‘the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets’ ” (*Amos 3:7, ESV*), and through the prophet Moses, He revealed to Pharaoh what was coming next. The most solemn warning was given to Pharaoh. This will be a just judgment upon pride, exploitation, violence, and idolatry, all of which have triggered these calamities upon Egypt.

Read Exodus 11:1–10. What warning did God give before executing judgment upon Egypt?

God gave Egypt time—three days of darkness (*Exod. 10:22, 23*)—to think about recent events and what they meant. He also provided their last explicit warning, the last chance to do the right thing.

But Exodus 11:8 says that Moses “went out from Pharaoh in great anger” (*NKJV*). Why would Moses leave in anger? Most likely because he knows the tragedy, the tenth plague, is going to hit a lot of innocent people—all because of Pharaoh’s hardness of heart.

Also, the number ten is significant in biblical symbolism. Ten represents fullness or completeness. (Think of the Ten Commandments as a complete revelation of the divine moral law.) The ten Egyptian plagues point to God’s full expression of His justice and retribution.

God is the Judge, and He is against pride, injustice, discrimination, arrogance, exploitation, cruelty, and selfishness. He is on the side of the sufferers, the abused, the mistreated, and the persecuted. God will execute justice, which truly is another expression of His love. (*See Ps. 2:12, Ps. 33:5, Ps. 85:11, Ps. 89:14, Ps. 101:1, Isa. 16:5, Jer. 9:24.*)

We too should try the best we can to be both loving and just. However, we can easily fall into extremes, one way or another. Out of “love” we turn a blind eye to wrongs, to things that need to be corrected. Or we can coldly execute justice as if it were something made of steel. Neither extreme is correct. Instead, this is the ideal: “And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (*Micah 6:8, NKJV*).

If we can’t get the perfect balance (which we can’t), why is it better to err on the side of mercy instead of justice? Or is it?

Passover

Read Exodus 12:1–20. What specific instructions does God give to Moses and Aaron before Israel leaves Egypt?

One would expect God to instruct Moses and Aaron about how to organize the departure from Egypt: that is, how to make provisions for the escape, especially for the elderly, mothers with small children, animals, and so forth. Instead, God's instruction is surprising: He tells them how to celebrate the Passover. In other words, the focus is on worshipping the Lord, who was going to redeem them. Everything else would follow in due time.

Each family was to prepare a lamb, with nothing wasted. Everyone had to eat his or her portion, and if the family could not consume the entire lamb, they were to eat the meal together with another family.

Read Exodus 12:13, 14. What was the Lord going to do for them when the final plague came? What does all this symbolize?

The Exodus was to be celebrated regularly each year, not merely as a commemoration of a past event of what God had done for their forefathers but also as the actualization of God's liberating act for the present generation. This was to be a fresh experience for each group.

Verses 12 and 13 explain the meaning of the Passover: the divine judgment of destruction will "pass over" the Israelites; thus, they were to commemorate "Passover." This word is a combination of two words, "pass" and "over," because the destruction "passed over" the Israelite homes on which the doorposts had been marked by the blood of the lamb, the sign of life and salvation. In Hebrew, the name of Passover is *Pesach*, from a verb that means "to pass over."

The celebration of the Passover was to remind every Israelite of the mighty and gracious acts of God on behalf of His people. This celebration helped to secure their national identity and seal their religious convictions.

Why is it so important always to remember the good that God has done to you in the past and to trust that He will do good for you in the future, as well?

Pesach

Read Exodus 12:17–23. What role does blood play in the celebration of this new festival?

The blood of the sacrificed animal is a key element in this celebration. Those who participated in this feast had put the blood of the slain lamb on the doorframes of their houses. In this way, they demonstrated their faith in God, believing that He would deliver them from what those not covered by the blood would face.

What a powerful expression of the gospel!

The Passover lamb had to be without blemish because it pointed to Jesus Christ, “ ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*). The animal’s blood played a crucial role: it symbolized protection and was the sign of life at a time of death.

“ ‘ “Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” ’ ” (*Exod. 12:13, NKJV*).

The whole gospel was associated with the celebration of the Passover because it pointed not only to freedom from slavery and going to the Promised Land but to Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for our sins and His merits applied to all who are covered by His blood.

Centuries later as Paul looked back on this celebration, he wrote: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (*1 Cor. 5:7, NKJV*).

Yeast, or leaven, was used to prepare dough of various kinds. When it is first mentioned in the Bible, it is in connection with the preparation of the unleavened bread on the eve of the Israelites’ departure from Egypt. Yeast also had to be removed from their homes (*Exod. 12:8, 15–20; Exod. 13:3–7*). In this particular context, yeast was a symbol of sin (*1 Cor. 5:6–8*); therefore, it was not to be used during the Passover festival for a week.

The unleavened bread is a symbol of the sinless Messiah, who overcame all temptations and gave His life for us (*John 1:29, 1 Cor. 5:7, Heb. 4:15*). A bunch of “hyssop,” which was dipped in the blood, symbolized God’s purifying grace (*Pss. 51:7*). In short, all through *Pesach*, the redeeming work of Jesus is revealed.

What does the fact that it took the blood of Jesus, God Himself, to atone for sin to teach us about how bad sin really is?

Passing the Torch

The psalmist states how our children can know God and His loving care: “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts” (*Ps. 145:4, ESV*). One family should speak to another family about God, about His marvelous deeds, and about His teachings, all in order to pass biblical knowledge on to another generation.

Read Exodus 12:24–28. What important point was being made here?

Parents were the first teachers in Israel and were to recount the story of the Exodus to their children. It was not to be told as a past historical event only but to be presented as their own experience, even though it happened a long time ago. By celebrating this festival, they were to identify with their forefathers, and the history was to be relived and actualized. The father would say: “I was in Egypt, I saw the defeat of the Egyptian gods and the plagues on Egypt, and I was set free.” In the book of Exodus, it is twice underlined how parents should answer their children’s questions regarding the Passover (*see Deut. 6:6–8 and Exodus 13:14–16*).

It is worthwhile to notice that the Israelites were still in Egypt when told to celebrate their liberation from Egypt. The whole celebration, then, was an act of faith. After receiving their directions, “the people bowed down and worshiped” (*Exod. 12:27, NIV*) their Redeemer, and then they followed the Passover instructions.

In the book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites are reminded to tell their story in such a way that they can internalize it as their own journey. Notice the collective tone of this account as well as the stress on the present experience: “ ‘My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey’ ” (*Deut. 26:5-9, NIV*).

Also, by recounting and retelling the story of Passover (or any events in sacred history) to their children, parents would be greatly helped in remembering what God had done for them and for the people. Telling it was as much for the speaker as for the hearers.

The Divine Judgment

Read Exodus 12:29, 30 on how God struck down the firstborn in Egypt. Why did God focus on the firstborn? (See also Heb. 11:28.)

The last Egyptian plague fell on the firstborn. It was a divine judgment on all the gods of Egypt and upon all the families who worshiped these false gods, which were worthless idols that reflected the people's own passions, desires, and fears.

As the earlier plagues had shown, these idols were unable to save the people. Their worthlessness was even more apparent now, during the tenth plague, which brought, by far, the greatest consequences on the Egyptians.

"Throughout the vast realm of Egypt the pride of every household had been laid low. The shrieks and wails of the mourners filled the air. King and courtiers, with blanched faces and trembling limbs, stood aghast at the overmastering horror."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 280.

Pharaoh represented the ultimate power and god of Egypt, and his firstborn son was considered a son of a god. Isis was a goddess protecting children; Heqet was a goddess attending women at childbirth; and Min was a god of reproduction. Besides these, there were several Egyptian gods of fertility. All these gods were powerless in comparison to the living Lord. Moses says: "'Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?' " (*Exod. 15:11, ESV*). Jethro later testified: "'Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly' " (*Exod. 18:11, NIV*).

According to Exodus 1, the Egyptians had killed newborn sons of Israel on the command of Pharaoh to weaken the Israelites and to subdue and humiliate them. Now God's punishment strikes the firstborn sons of Egypt. What people sow, they reap.

Our decisions and actual behavior bring consequences. And the painful truth, which we all have experienced, is that we alone don't suffer from the consequences of our wrong actions. Others, sometimes many others, even innocent others, suffer, as well. Such is the nature of sin.

In what ways have you suffered from others' sins? Or, what are ways others have suffered from your sins? What is our only hope?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Passover,” pp. 273–280, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The Passover was to be both commemorative and typical, not only pointing back to the deliverance from Egypt, but forward to the greater deliverance which Christ was to accomplish in freeing His people from the bondage of sin. The sacrificial lamb represents ‘the Lamb of God,’ in whom is our only hope of salvation. Says the apostle, ‘Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.’ 1 Corinthians 5:7. It was not enough that the paschal lamb be slain; its blood must be sprinkled upon the doorposts; so the merits of Christ’s blood must be applied to the soul. We must believe, not only that He died for the world, but that He died for us individually. We must appropriate to ourselves the virtue of the atoning sacrifice.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 277.

To this day, observant Jewish families around the world celebrate Passover, *Pesach*. They have what they call a “Passover Seder” (“Seder” means “order/arrangement”) during which they recount the Exodus and then enjoy a special meal as a family. Amazing that this has been kept since, literally, the time of the Exodus! Only the seventh-day Sabbath, which observant Jews keep as well, goes back even farther into antiquity.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How can we understand the “fairness” of the Lord in striking dead the firstborn, many of whom were surely “innocent”? How can we harmonize this with the powerful reality of God’s love? Think, too, of the Flood. How do we understand this?
- ❷ What is the meaning of the symbolic saying that believers are covered by the blood of Jesus and that His blood cleanses them from all their iniquities?
- ❸ Read the following words: “The followers of Christ must be partakers of His experience. They must receive and assimilate the word of God so that it shall become the motive power of life and action. By the power of Christ they must be changed into His likeness, and reflect the divine attributes. . . . The spirit and work of Christ must become the spirit and work of His disciples.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 278. How do we allow Christ to do in us what is written here?

Swapping Soccer for God

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Silva Langa, a high school student in Mozambique, loved soccer. The sport was his god, and he played whenever he could. He was a skillful player and dreamed about a big-league career.

Then a friend surprised him by saying, bluntly, “You have many good qualities, but you lack God.” Silva’s surprise grew when the friend, Hodes, invited him to church on Saturday. Silva had never heard of a church that worshiped on Saturdays. In addition, Saturday wasn’t a good day for him to go to church. It was the day he most often played soccer matches.

Hodes, however, was a good friend, and Silva accompanied him to church on the next Saturday that he was free. Silva was surprised again. Church members showered him with love and affection. The hymns touched his heart. He studied the Bible, and he gave his heart to Jesus in baptism.

Many of Silva’s relatives and friends couldn’t understand why he had stopped playing soccer on Saturdays.

“You have a crazy faith,” said one.

“Why would anyone go to church instead of a soccer game?” said another.

Silva explained his faith as best as he could.

His parents became worried when Silva skipped university entrance exams on a Saturday. They questioned his mental health, asking him why he was willing to risk his future for the Sabbath. It was a severe trial for Silva, but he decided to adopt the courage of Peter and other apostles and declare like them, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (*Acts 5:29, NKJV*).

The dismay of his parents grew when the school called to ask why he wasn’t going to Friday night classes. Several relatives pleaded with local Adventist leaders to tell Silva to study on Friday nights. The leaders did not offer a Bible study on the Sabbath. Instead, they offered assurances that God would not leave the teen and that he would graduate from high school.

Before long, Silva was able to transfer to an Adventist high school, where he no longer faced Sabbath conflicts. He graduated from the high school.

Today, Silva is an entrepreneur who has no regrets about giving up his god of soccer for the God of heaven. His life of faithfulness has led two of his sisters and other people to baptism.

“God has blessed my life,” Silva said. “I thank God that today my family respects my beliefs.”

Pray for the gospel to be proclaimed in Mozambique and other countries in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, which will receive this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

Through *the* Red Sea



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 12:31–36, James 2:17–20, Exod. 13:1–14:31, Heb. 11:22, Exod. 15:1–21, Rev. 15:2–4.*

Memory Text: “And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace’ ” (*Exodus 14:13, 14, NKJV*).

The Exodus is the most dramatic and glorious experience of God's people in the Old Testament. This event is the divine model of how God defeated the Hebrews' enemies and brought the Israelites victoriously into the Promised Land. It's also a symbol of salvation and redemption in Christ.

From a human standpoint, the children of Israel were in a desperate, even impossible, situation—one that they, in and of themselves, could not save themselves from. If they were to be delivered, it would have to be by a divine act. It's the same with us and sin: in and of ourselves, we are in a hopeless situation. We need something even more dramatic than the Exodus. And we've got it: the cross of Christ and what Christ did there for us all.

The events of Israel's departure from the land of Goshen, mentioned in Exodus 12—until the song of Moses, joyously sung in Exodus 15—are breathtaking and incredible. God's signs, wonders, and miraculous redeeming works are at their peak.

But even these do not compare to what Christ did for us at the cross, of which the drama of the Exodus was a mere foreshadowing.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 9.

Go, and Worship the Lord

On the night of Passover, divine judgment fell on those not covered by the blood (*Exod. 12:1–12*). No one escaped because of position, education, social status, or gender. Punishment struck all families, from Pharaoh to slaves, and even the firstborn of the animals. The pride of Egypt was in the dust.

Read Exodus 12:31–36. What strange request does Pharaoh make and why, even as he gives permission for them all to leave?

How interesting that Pharaoh, in telling the Hebrews to go and worship, adds this request: “And bless me also.”

And bless me also?

Why would he, the king of Egypt, a “god” on earth among his people, ask that? It sounds as if he’s finally catching on to the power of the Hebrew God and would like to benefit from it. However, how can God bless him while he is steeped in rebellion, stubbornness, sin, and pride? Sure, he finally gave his consent, but it wasn’t out of submission to the will of Yahweh. It was, instead, out of defeat. He wasn’t repentant—as his later actions will reveal. He simply wanted to stop the devastation that was destroying his kingdom.

Pharaoh was humiliated. And, given the tragic circumstances from the worst plague of all, he gives permission for Israel to leave Egypt. What he refused to grant all previous times, and no matter the suffering his actions brought upon his nation, he now permits.

And the Egyptian people, understandably, are eager for the Hebrews to go, as well. As they said, please leave, or else “we shall all be dead.”

God, meanwhile, made provision so that the Israelites did not leave Egypt empty-handed but with things they would need for what, in the end, would turn out to be a much longer sojourn than anticipated. The Egyptians gave the Jews these precious articles only to hurry the people out of the country, but the items were wages that were long denied the Israelites for centuries of slave labor. Surely for the Egyptians, the price of getting the Hebrews out of their land was cheap enough.

How often have we “repented” of actions only because of their consequences and not because those acts were themselves wrong? Why is that not true repentance? How can we learn to be sorry for the sins that, in a sense, we “get away with,” at least in the short term?

Consecration of the Firstborn

The promised time of redemption, of deliverance, was about to arrive. The people needed to be prepared. They needed not just to believe but to act on those beliefs. God had told them what they needed to do; by faith, they now needed to do it. Though in a totally different context from what James was writing about, the principle fits very well: “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (*James 2:17–20, NKJV*).

Read Exodus 13:1–16. The Israelite firstborns were spared by God’s grace during the final plague. Why this perpetual command, and what should it mean to us today?

God mercifully guarded the Israelite families who were under the blood because, by faith, they had marked their doorframes. These new directions came from the Lord through Moses: “ ‘Consecrate to me every firstborn male’ ” (*Exod. 13:2, NIV*). This legislation was valid for humans as well as for animals.

One principle behind this injunction is that everything belongs to Him because He is our Creator and the Owner of everything: “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (*Ps. 24:1, NIV*). “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts” (*Hag. 2:8, ESV*). The Israelites’ firstborn sons were the firstfruits of God’s blessings, which He had bestowed upon them; they were also a sign of their total consecration to Him and of their understanding that all they possessed came only from Him.

Also, we see the idea of redemption, of salvation, here. The firstborn sons were spared death because they were covered by the blood. They were redeemed from death, as are all who are under the blood of Jesus. As Paul writes about Jesus: “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (*Col. 1:14, NKJV*).

Meanwhile, regulations were given about how this dedication should be offered, a celebration of their deliverance from Egyptian slavery. They were to sacrifice the animals, but their sons were to be redeemed (*Exod. 13:12, 13, 15*).

Exodus 13:16 tells about what they were to put on their hands and between their eyes. How does this symbolize the important spiritual truth that, regardless of how much faith we have, we must act upon that faith?

Crossing the Red Sea

Read Exodus 13:17–14:12. How did God guide the Israelites when they left Egypt, and what happened next?

Following God's instructions to Moses, the Israelites left Egypt as a well-organized army. The Hebrew terms *tsaba'* and *makhaneh* testify to that description, namely, "army," "division," "camp," and "hosts" (*Exod. 6:26; Exod. 7:4; Exod. 12:17, 41, 51; Exod. 14:19, 20; compare with Exod. 13:18*). They were divided into units and marched like an army. Later Balaam saw from Moab's hills that Israel was "encamped tribe by tribe" (*Num. 24:2, NIV*).

Meanwhile, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him" (*Exod. 13:19, NIV*). This is a very important detail in the text, and it reveals the fulfillment of Joseph's faith in God's promises. Joseph never lost sight of the Promised Land, even though he lived in the splendor and privileges of Egypt. He requested that his bones be taken to the land of Canaan (*Gen. 50:24, 25*). He believed that the Lord would surely visit Israel in Egypt and bring them to the land, as He had sworn (*Heb. 11:22*). On Israel's arrival in Canaan, Joseph's bones were "buried at Shechem" (*Josh. 24:32, NKJV*).

The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire were the visible signs of God's presence among His people. The Lord dwelt there and spoke also from the cloud (*Exod. 14:24; Num. 12:5, 6*).

Meanwhile, Pharaoh reveals the true motives of his heart. He is not converted, and he never truly repented. His asking God to bless him was a farce, perhaps a deception in his own heart. He gathered his army, and they went after their escaped slaves. How totally blinded by sin this man really was.

When the people saw Pharaoh's army coming, they spoke words and expressed sentiments that would be echoed by them more than once: " 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?' " (*Exod. 14:11, NKJV*).

That is, having already seen such dramatic manifestations of God's power, which included the sparing of their own firstborn sons, the people still displayed a stunning lack of faith.

Think of the last time you faced a terrible situation. What was your first reaction: faith in God or a lack of faith? What lessons should you have learned from that situation that could help you the next time another comes (and come it will)?

Marching Forward by Faith

Read Exodus 14:13–31. Despite their lack of faith, what did God do for the children of Israel?

Because Moses wholeheartedly trusted God and His Word, he encouraged the people. He presented four crucial points on how to act in difficult situations:

1. “‘Do not be afraid’ ” (*Exod. 14:13, NKJV*). The first appeal is to trust the Lord, because only in this way can fear be overcome. Isaiah reminds us of this truth by stating that believers are in God’s hands, and He will act for them when they accept Him as their God and Lord: “‘So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. . . . For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you’ ” (*Isa. 41:10, 13, NIV*).
2. “‘Stand [firm] still’ ” (*Exod. 14:13, NKJV*). To “stand still” does not mean only to stop murmuring and to expect great things but also to trust God and to wait patiently for His mighty intervention, because He will act.
3. “‘You will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today’ ” (*Exod. 14:13, NIV*). For our faith to grow, it is important to recognize God’s leadership and help and to be grateful for His promised assistance. To “see” means to open one’s eyes (because disbelief is blind). Only God can provide victory, safety, and salvation. God is always for us, caring and providing what is needed at the appropriate time.
4. “‘The LORD will fight for you’ ” (*Exod. 14:14, NKJV*). This indicates what God will do: He will personally fight for His people. Calvary is the ultimate proof of this reality, for on the cross Christ defeated Satan in order to give us eternal life (*John 5:24; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 12:10, 11*). Later, even the Egyptians recognized that the Lord was fighting for the Israelites (*Exod. 14:25*).

God’s command to Moses was clear: “Move on.” God unfolded His action plan step by step: (1) the Angel of God and the pillar of cloud moved from the front of Israel’s camp and stood behind them, protecting them from the Egyptian army; (2) by faith Moses had to stretch out his hand over the sea; (3) the Lord divided the water and dried it up with a strong wind; and (4) the result was that the Israelites went securely through the sea on dry ground to the other side. The Egyptians blindly pursued them, because they did not see that God was doing extraordinary things for His people; that is, they didn’t see until it was too late, as their confession in Exodus 14:25 revealed.

The Song of Moses and Miriam

The whole Egyptian army was overthrown; no one survived, including Pharaoh (*see Ps. 136:15*). It was a stunning defeat for the Egyptians and a complete victory for God's people. No wonder all through their history, and even to this day, the Jews recount this story.

Read Exodus 15:1–21. What is the content of Moses' song?

This song praises the Lord because He is a mighty warrior who defeated those who opposed His people. Moses personally elaborates on this theme by stressing that the Lord, his God, is also his strength, song, and salvation. No one is like Him, “ ‘majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders’ ” (*Exod. 15:11, NIV*).

Moses' song is all about God, about who He is and what He is doing. The Lord is exalted, praised, and admired for His outstanding work for His people. Gratitude and worship are natural outcomes of God's goodness toward us. Appreciation for His love is the prerequisite of a vibrant spiritual life. God's steadfast love is especially emphasized and glorified because He will lead the people whom He has redeemed, and He will guide them to the holy abiding place. Moses predicts that God will establish the sanctuary on the mountain of His inheritance (*Exod. 15:17*), all pointing ahead to Zion and to the temple in Jerusalem.

In Revelation 15:2–4, the redeemed sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Can you imagine how this will sound in heaven, this praise to God for His great and marvelous deeds, praise to God for His just and true judgments, and praise to God for His righteous acts and His holiness?

Notice the last line of the song. “ ‘For all nations shall come and worship before You. For Your judgments have been manifested’ ” (*NKJV*). That is, when all of God's judgments—especially His judgments upon the evil and oppression that have for millennia gone unpunished—have all been made manifest, the redeemed of the nations will praise Him for those judgments.

Immanuel Kant said that if God is just, then there must be some kind of afterlife. Why is that statement so true, and how can we learn to trust that one day the justice so long lacking here will come? How can you draw comfort from that hope?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Exodus,” pp. 281–290, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

God was for the Israelites despite their little faith. He wished to teach and guide them in how to think and behave as His chosen people. God led them patiently and directed them to a location where they would encounter fewer challenges. Ellen G. White explains: “The Israelites . . . had little knowledge of God and little faith in Him, and they would have become terrified and disheartened. They were unarmed and unaccustomed to war, their spirits were depressed by long bondage, and they were encumbered with women and children, flocks and herds. In leading them by the way of the Red Sea, the Lord revealed Himself as a God of compassion as well as of judgment.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 282.

Talking about the Song of Moses, the *Andrews Bible Commentary* says: “The certainty of this redemptive act of God in history assures us that we have nothing to fear for the future. The last stanza focuses on future enemies who would be faced in conquest of Canaan. Because of God’s powerful ‘arm,’ they would be ‘as still as a stone’ (v. 16). When we face certain impossibilities, when we feel cornered and do not know which way to turn, we can find assurance in ‘The Song of Moses,’ for it commemorates a great event in the history of God’s people.”—*Andrews Bible Commentary*, “Exodus” (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), p. 214.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Why do we find ourselves so often in the position of the Hebrews after their incredible deliverance from Egypt but before the challenge of the Red Sea? That is, in the face of so much evidence for God’s goodness toward us and of His power, why do we still find it so easy to show, and even express, a lack of faith?
- ② Even after all that had happened, including the loss of the firstborn sons, why would Pharaoh still pursue Israel? What should this tell us about how dangerous it is for any of us to get hardened by sin (or to sin)?
- ③ Though we all face terrible trials at times, many of us have had (and still have) some very good days, some very good times, when nothing bad happens to us or to our loved ones. Why should we see these times as evidence of God’s grace and protection because, after all, we understand that we live in “enemy” territory? That is, why should we always remember to praise God in the good times, because we never know what calamities we have been spared from?

Special Mission: Hospital

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Dmitry Bagal, a Russian missionary living in Germany, found a hospital to be an unexpected mission field while receiving cancer treatment for what turned out to be three benign tumors. He saw people from all walks of life—especially secular and post-Christian people, and people from non-Christian world religions—struggling over tough questions about God.

One patient received six rounds of chemotherapy and underwent an operation at the Munich hospital. But when his cancer returned after six weeks, the doctor saw no point in removing it again. The man couldn't think clearly and barely recognized his wife. Her only desire, meanwhile, was to stay with her husband during his last days in the palliative-care unit. At an opportune moment, Dmitry gave the wife a booklet about God and suffering, and he prayed with the couple. The prayer moved the wife to tears.

Later that day, Dmitry gave the woman copies of *The Great Controversy* and *The Desire of Ages*, saying the books have provided great comfort to him and many others. The woman wanted the books—but not for free. She gave him 14 euros (U.S.\$15), all the change in her purse. Dmitry believes that the two will meet again, if not on this Earth, then on the new earth.

Dmitry also met a young man hospitalized with an unknown illness. The man, who was from Iran, had given up his studies in Britain and flown to Germany for treatment. Doctors, however, couldn't diagnose his illness. He couldn't walk, so Dmitry pushed him around the hospital grounds in a wheelchair nearly every day. Even though he hadn't been raised Christian, he allowed Dmitry to pray to Jesus on his behalf. As Dmitry prayed day after day, the young man began to recover. Before long, he could stand and walk with assistance. The two conversed in German, but because the young man had studied in Britain, Dmitry gave him an English copy of *The Great Controversy*. Months later, Dmitry was still praying for him, treasuring the words, "But remember that you do not know and cannot measure the result of faithful effort" (Ellen G. White, *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 114).

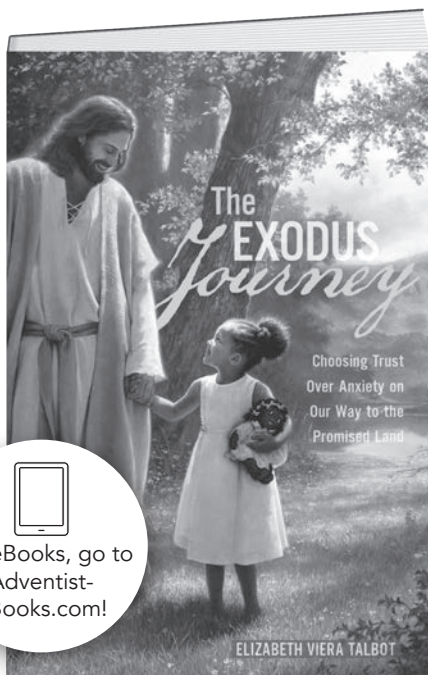
During two weeks in the hospital, Dmitry gave away 20 copies of *The Great Controversy* as well as other books; distributed many business cards with QR codes to download the book; and stocked about 10 of the hospital's public bookshelves with books.



"Many seeds have been sown, and I pray that they will bear fruit," he said. "We work under God's guidance and leave the results to Him."

This Inside Story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach ... among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." Read more at IWillGo.org.

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The Bread *and* Water of Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 15:22–16:36, Gen. 3:1–6, Exod. 17:1–7, 1 Cor. 10:4, Exod. 18:1–27, 1 Cor. 10:11.*

Memory Text: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day” (*Exodus 16:28–30, NKJV*).

After leaving Egypt, Israel was on an unknown journey to the Promised Land. The people faced a demanding and long trek, and they needed to learn a multitude of new lessons. The Lord would lead and care for them; and, yes, He desired to help them grow, but they must learn discipline, self-control, sacrifice, unselfishness, trust in the Lord, and especially obedience.

Moses was a visible leader, and the people had to follow him and his leadership if they were to triumph. It was crucial for them to stay together, to cooperate as a community, and to assist each other. There were many hindrances and challenges ahead. So much of their spiritual growth would depend on how they met those challenges and how they responded to Moses, especially when the challenges became great.

The familiar Chinese saying that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” was true in their situation, and they needed to trust the Lord’s directions with every footstep. Tragically, as we will see, they didn’t learn those lessons so easily.

But then again, who does?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 16.

Bitter Waters

In biblical narratives, different roles are played by different characters, good or bad, and we need to pay close attention to plots, places, timing, and villains. However, the most important point in a storyline is usually the solution and the lessons learned. It's no different in these accounts.

As the episodes show, God is the Problem Solver and the Peacemaker; however, His work is complicated by people's unbelief. As a result of their constant murmuring and disobedience, the Hebrews experienced serious complications, even tragedies. They brought upon themselves many difficulties because of their incredulity and unrepentance.

Read Exodus 15:22–27. After crossing the Red Sea, what was the background to the first miracle performed?

The first test of Israel's faith is associated with the need for water, not surprising given the harsh, hot, and dry desert environment. After three days of traveling, the people finally found water, but it was undrinkable. *Marah* means "bitter," and because the water was bitter, Israel's faith in their caring Lord quickly floundered. However, God reacted with compassion, and the first miracle was performed with a piece of wood. Of course, it was not the wood but the Lord who made the water sweet and drinkable. The people had to learn important lessons: (1) patience in waiting for the Lord's timing, and (2) that God does things in cooperation with humans.

However, the children of Israel took so many things for granted and quickly forgot the great miracles that God had done for them—miracles for which they had just so passionately sung praises to Him, declaring: " 'Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?' " (*Exod. 15:11, ESV*).

And yet, even after their grumbling, God promised that He would not bring upon the Israelites "any of the diseases" (*Exod. 15:26, NIV*) that had plagued the Egyptians. He would protect them. They could experience this promise only on the condition that they stayed faithful to Him.

What trials and struggles have you brought upon yourself? What comfort can you get in knowing that God will still work on your behalf if you cooperate with Him?

Quail and Manna

Unfortunately, there is a repetitive pattern of rebellion in these pilgrimage stories. The people were notoriously forgetful that the mighty hand of God had helped them in the past and that He had provided solutions to their problems. They let their present problems blind them to their ultimate goal and their promised wonderful future. It's a common problem even among God's people today, as well.

Read Exodus 16:1–36. What was the cause of the Israelites' grumbling, and what followed?

It is important to notice that temptations in the Bible are often related to food. In the Garden of Eden, the Fall was related to eating from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil (*Gen. 2:16, 17; Gen. 3:1–6*). In Jesus' wilderness temptations, Satan's first shot at Him was through food (*Matt. 4:3*). Esau lost his firstborn rights because of his undisciplined appetite (*Gen. 25:29–34*). How often was Israel's disobedience connected to food and drink! No wonder Moses reminded later generations:

“ ‘Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD’ ” (*Deut. 8:3, ESV*).

Manna, of course, was a heavenly bread that God supplied the Israelites with during their 40 years of sojourning in the wilderness. Through this gift, He taught them that He is the Creator and the Provider of everything. Also, God used His supernatural provision of manna to show them how to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

Each week four miracles happened: (1) for six days, God gave a daily allotment of manna; (2) on Fridays, a double portion of manna was given; (3) the manna did not spoil from Friday to Sabbath; and (4) no manna fell on Sabbath. God was constantly performing these miracles so the people would remember the Sabbath day and celebrate God's goodness on that day. God said: “ ‘Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath’ ” (*Exod. 16:29, NIV*).

People like to eat. We were created to like to eat. The rich abundance of food, growing out of the ground (our original diet), reveals not only that God wants us to eat but that we are to like what we eat, too. How, though, can this wonderful gift, that of food (and our liking to eat it), be abused?

Water From the Rock

In the wilderness, you need plenty of water. God took care of this problem, even though the people were quarrelsome, did not trust Him, and even tested His ability and willingness to give them water. In their unbelief, they looked back to Egypt.

Read Exodus 17:1–7. What lesson should the people have learned from this incident?

Moses called the place *Massah*, meaning “testing,” and *Meribah*, which signified “quarreling.” The Lord gave the Israelites water despite their unbelief. These two names should have reminded the Israelites not to test God and not to quarrel with Him (*Heb. 3:7, 8, 15*). They seriously questioned God’s presence among them, although they had already seen much tangible evidence of not only His presence but of His power and His authority.

“Moses smote the rock, but it was the Son of God who, veiled in the cloudy pillar, stood beside Moses, and caused the life-giving water to flow. Not only Moses and the elders, but all the congregation who stood at a distance, beheld the glory of the Lord; but had the cloud been removed, they would have been slain by the terrible brightness of Him who abode therein.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 298.

Water is a symbol of life because without water there is no life. Every cell in our body needs water. We are 60 percent water ourselves. Even our bones are composed partly of water. Thus, providing water in the wilderness for them was a sign for the Israelites that God cared for their needs and that they could trust Him. But, again, they had to obey.

Many centuries later, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:4, reminds believers that the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness was unique. Christ Himself not only guided them but provided them with water (*Pss. 78:15, 16*) and met other spiritual and physical needs. Paul proclaimed: “That Rock was Christ.” For them, Christ was the Source of life and the Giver of eternal life. As a rock is solid, so God firmly led His people. One can count on Him because He does not fail to fulfill His promises.

What are some things that, right now, you need to trust God with? How can you learn to submit to His will and wait for Him to act in His time? Why is this not always so easy to do?

Jethro

Moses was visited by Jethro, his father-in-law, who is also called Reuel (*Exod. 2:18*). Jethro brought with him Moses' wife, Zipporah, and two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. When Moses heard that they were coming, he went out to welcome them.

Read Exodus 18:1–27. What major steps in the history of the nation took place here?

Jethro came because he had heard about the astonishing deliverance God had done for Israel. Moses narrated to Jethro in detail “everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them” (*Exod. 18:8, NIV*).

Jethro praised God’s kindness and extraordinary interventions on behalf of His people, declaring,

“ ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people’ ” (*Exod. 18:10, 11, ESV*).

What we see here is an example of how God’s work among His people was to be a witness to the world of who the true God is and of what He can do for His people.

At the same time that Jethro learned about the true God, he himself had something to offer God’s people: wise and beneficial advice. Moses needed to organize the legal system with just and fair principles. He also needed dedicated and faithful judges, men of integrity. Jethro wisely enumerated the following qualifications: (1) men who fear God; (2) men who are trustworthy; and (3) men who hate dishonest gain. Capable people of good character had to be appointed over different units of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. In this way, Moses’ administrative load would be reduced, and he could focus on significant problems. Thus, the people would be well served.

Moses accepted Jethro’s wise counsel (*Exod. 18:24*) and appointed leaders to different administrative roles (*see also Deut. 1:9–18*).

Moses could have just brushed off the old man and told him to mind his own business. He didn’t. What important lessons can we learn from his willingness to listen to this person who wasn’t even a Hebrew?

The Bread and Water of Life

Read 1 Corinthians 10:11. What reason does Paul give for these events to have been recorded?

Paul explains that all the things that happened to the Israelites are examples and warnings for Christ's followers and will help them avoid the same troubles; that is, they will learn from these examples. This is pertinent instruction for us, we who live at "the end of the ages" (*ESV*). God gives His people the Holy Spirit to strengthen the believers with "power, love and self-discipline" (*2 Tim. 1:7, NIV*) so they can make correct decisions and follow His teaching. Jesus Christ is the Source of new life (*John 14:6*), and only He can turn us into "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. . . . Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (*Rom. 12:1, 2, ESV*).

Later on, in His ministry, Jesus picked up lessons from these Old Testament accounts, particularly with the manna and the water, using those images to teach truths about Himself, the One who led the Israelites through the wilderness.

Read John 4:7–15 and John 6:31–51. What truths are revealed here for us as Christians?

The Samaritan woman discovered that Christ offers something that she would not get anywhere else. The inner thirst for peace, joy, and happiness comes from God, and thus only God can satisfy it (*Ps. 42:1, 2*).

Later, in the context of the manna, Jesus explained that it was God, not Moses, who provided it for the people. Then Jesus declared: "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger" (*John 6:35, ESV*). Jesus repeated two times that He is the Bread of Life (*John 6:35, 41, 48*).

As the manna in the wilderness was "bread from heaven" (*John 6:31, 32*), so the water from the rock was Christ's gift to satisfy their thirst. Besides these physical aspects, bread and water also had spiritual significance, for Jesus Christ is "the bread of life" (*John 6:35, 48*) and "the living water" (*John 4:10, 11, 14; John 7:37, 38*). Only in Him, then, can our spiritual thirst and hunger truly be satisfied.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pp. 291–302, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Not long after the incident with the water, the nation faced a new danger (*see Exod. 17:8–16*)—a fierce and warlike tribe, the Amalekites, attacked them. “The Amalekites were not ignorant of God’s character or of His sovereignty, but instead of fearing before Him, they had set themselves to defy His power. The wonders wrought by Moses before the Egyptians were made a subject of mockery by the people of Amalek, and the fears of surrounding nations were ridiculed. They had taken oath by their gods that they would destroy the Hebrews, so that not one should escape, and they boasted that Israel’s God would be powerless to resist them. They had not been injured or threatened by the Israelites. Their assault was wholly unprovoked. It was to manifest their hatred and defiance of God that they sought to destroy His people. The Amalekites had long been high-handed sinners, and their crimes had cried to God for vengeance, yet His mercy had still called them to repentance; but when the men of Amalek fell upon the wearied and defenseless ranks of Israel, they sealed their nation’s doom.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 300.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the idea of how Jethro learned about the true God from what God did for His people. (*See Exod. 18:8–10.*) Why does that principle hold true today? Ask yourself and your class: What kind of witness does our church present to the world? What do we say to the world about the nature and character of our God?
- ❷ Read again 1 Corinthians 10:4. What should this teach us about the ancient heresy, which some believe today, that says the Old Testament God was vengeful, hateful, and unforgiving, in contrast to what we see in Jesus? How does this verse show why that belief is wrong?
- ❸ Read again what Ellen G. White wrote above about how the Amalekites had the opportunity to learn about the true God. Contrast their attitude to Jethro’s. What lessons can we learn about why God brought judgment upon not just them but upon many of the tribes in the ancient world that Israel came in contact with?

Special Mission: Rehab

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After surgery to remove three benign tumors, Dmitry Bagal, a Russian missionary living in Germany, was sent for rehabilitation to a vacation resort in Lower Bavaria. There, he found a new mission field where God was working on the hearts of secular and post-Christian people.

One afternoon, Dmitry walked over to a group of people at a Greek restaurant. They called out that the restaurant was closed, and Dmitry responded with a question. “Do you like to read books?” he asked.

Only one man replied. Speaking with a thick Italian accent, he said he preferred to watch movies and had read only one book, the Bible, in his life. Dmitry gave him *The Great Controversy* and explained that it offered a unique perspective on history, especially on the struggle between good and evil. The man read the back cover. “I really want to read this book!” he exclaimed. But he didn’t want the book for free. He gave Dmitry a donation.

Another day, Dmitry paused during a walk to sit beside a stranger on a bench. The two men struck up a conversation. The man said he was a farmer who had no free time, but his threshing machine had broken, and he was waiting for it to be repaired. “Do you like to read books?” Dmitry asked.

The man conceded that he didn’t like to read but said his wife did. Dmitry gave him a *Great Controversy* for his wife. The man read the back cover and declared that he had changed his mind. He wanted to read the book.

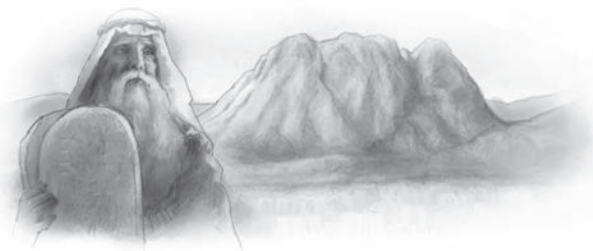
Resuming his walk, Dmitry passed a car with a bumper sticker that read, “God does miracles in Germany.” Wanting to meet the car’s owner, he rang the doorbell of the house in front of the car. On the door, he saw a sign that read, “Honey from our own beehives.” When a woman opened the door, he asked about the honey. The two talked about honey for a few minutes and then about faith. The woman said Jesus had miraculously healed her of an illness. Dmitry bought a jar of honey and offered her the choice of a book as a gift: *The Desire of Ages* or *The Great Controversy*. She chose *The Desire of Ages*. Thanking Dmitry, she gave him a second jar of honey as a gift. Dmitry thanked her by giving her the other book, *The Great Controversy*. Both were incredibly happy with their meeting.

During his month in rehab, Dmitry distributed nearly 50 copies of *The Great Controversy* and changed the focus of his mission work in Germany. “Because I enjoy sharing books so much, I’m preparing to become a literature evangelist,” he said.



This Inside Story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: “To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions.” Read more at IWillGo.org.

Covenant *at* Sinai



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 19:1–20:17, Rev. 21:3, Deut. 5:6–21, James 1:23–25, Rom. 3:20–24, Rom. 10:4.*

Memory Text: “ ‘ “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” ’ ” (*Exodus 19:4–6, NKJV*).

Where did God lead Israel after He had liberated them from Egypt? To the Promised Land—where else? However geographically correct, that answer is theologically wrong. God Himself answers it: “ ‘ “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” ’ ” (*Exod. 19:4, NIV; emphasis added*). Thus, the biblical-theological answer to the question reveals God’s priority and goal: the Lord brought them to Himself.

When humans depart from God, He searches for them and calls them back to Himself. The best model of this profound truth is in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned against God, disobeyed His command, and hid from Him. He took the initiative and called: “ ‘Where are you?’ ” (*Gen. 3:9, NKJV*). He always makes the first step. Jesus states this eloquently: “ ‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest’ ” (*Matt. 11:28, 29, NKJV*).

God calls out to all of us; our eternal destiny depends on our response.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 23.

At Mount Sinai

Read Exodus 19:1–8. What did God promise them here, at the base of Mount Sinai?

God led the Israelites to Mount Sinai, where He would soon give them the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue). Jebel Musa (elevation: 7,497 feet, or 2,285 meters) in the Sinai Peninsula is likely where Moses met with God several times (*for example, Exod. 3:1, Exod. 19:2, Exod. 24:18*), and, years later, Elijah encountered God here (*1 Kings 19:8*). This is the same mountain where God called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt (*Exod. 3:1, 10*). At that time, God informed Moses that he would worship God with liberated Israel in this same location, which would be a sign for Moses that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was leading them (*Exod. 3:12*).

After two months of traveling, the Israelites arrived at Sinai (*Exod. 19:1*), where they would remain for about one year (*compare Exod. 19:1 with Num. 10:11, 12*). During this year, many laws were issued, as described in Exodus 19–40, Leviticus 1–27, and Numbers 1:1–10:10. Israel's stay at Mount Sinai is the central piece of the narrative found in the first five books of Moses. Here is the foundation of their becoming God's chosen people, the only nation not steeped in paganism and idolatry.

God takes the initiative and establishes the covenant between Himself and Israel. On the condition of the people's obedience and their maintaining a relationship with Him, God promises to make them a special treasure, a kingdom of priests, a holy people.

To be a holy people means to be dedicated to God and to reveal His character to others, especially to the nations around them. They were also called to function as a kingdom of priests who would connect other people with God, leading them to Him and teaching them His ways and His laws. They were to be God's special treasure because He wanted Israel as His channel to illuminate the world with knowledge of Him and His character.

This covenant was the legal establishment of a relationship between God and His people. The general covenant formula, which slightly varies in different texts, is: "I will be their God, and they will be my people" (*see Exod. 6:7, Lev. 26:12, Jer. 24:7, Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10, Rev. 21:3*).

Imagine being God's "special treasure"! What special privileges would that encompass? What special responsibilities would you have?

Preparing for the Gift

Read Exodus 19:9–25. How did God prepare Israel to receive the Ten Commandments?

God gave specific instructions for what the Israelites were to do in preparation for the giving of the law at Sinai. Their external purity was to reflect their total dedication to God. They needed to be ready for the splendid manifestation of the Lord's glory that was about to come. And when it did, it was accompanied by "thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled" (*Exod. 19:16, NKJV*).

The Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) is the heart of God's revelation and biblical ethics. It forms the substance and foundation of divine standards for all humanity; its principles are eternal and universal.

According to the biblical account, the Decalogue was announced by God (*Exod. 19:19; Exod. 20:1; Deut. 5:4, 5, 24*) and was written by Him (*Exod. 24:12, Exod. 31:18, Deut. 5:22*). It was twice given to Moses as a special gift (*Exod. 32:19; Exod. 34:1; Deut. 10:1, 2*).

In the book of Exodus, the Decalogue is called "the Testimony" (Hebrew: *'edut*; *Exod. 31:18*); or it is named "the words of the covenant" (Hebrew: *dibre habberit*; *Exod. 34:28*). In the book of Deuteronomy, they are written on "the tablets of the covenant" (*Deut. 9:9, 11, 15, NKJV*). Neither book in Hebrew uses the term "the Ten Commandments" (Hebrew: *mitzwot*, "commandments"). Instead, three times they call it "the Ten Words." The Hebrew is *'aseret haddebarim*, from *dabar*, meaning "word, sentence, matter, thing, speech, story, promise, utterance." (*See Exod. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, Deut. 10:4.*)

There are two versions of the Decalogue with very slight differences; the first one is recorded in Exodus 20:1–17 and the second in Deuteronomy 5:6–11. The second version, presented orally by Moses to Israel, occurred almost forty years after Sinai, just before the people entered the Promised Land (*Deut. 1:3, 4; Deut. 4:44–47*). These circumstances explain the slight differences between the two.

When Paul summarized the law as being love, he quoted from the Decalogue (*Rom. 13:8–10*). Love is, indeed, the sum of God's law because He is a God of love (*1 John 4:16*).

How do you understand the idea of the Ten Commandments as an expression of God's love? What does that mean? How is God's love revealed in them?

The Gift of the Decalogue

Read Exodus 20:1–17. What are the principles of the Decalogue, and how is it organized?

Note that the Decalogue does not begin with the commands but with God's gracious action for His people:

“‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery’ ” (*Exod. 20:2, NIV*). The Lord first shows His grace by giving freedom and salvation to Israel, and only then does He reveal His will. These commandments were to be observed out of love and gratitude for what God did for them.

God's key summation word for the Decalogue is “love” (*Rom. 13:10*). The greatest commandment is the commandment of love, which is expressed in two ways: love to God (*Deut. 6:5*) and love to our neighbor (*Lev. 19:18*).

In the first four commandments, the Decalogue interprets what it means to love God; in the following six commandments, the law interprets what it means to love your neighbor. The Decalogue begins with honoring God above all (vertical love) and continues with respecting others (horizontal love):

1. Honoring and revering God by giving Him the first and the highest place in every situation of our life (the first commandment);
2. Honoring and preserving God's unique position and not replacing Him by an idol in any form, either physical, symbolic, or spiritual. Our purest affections belong to the Lord (the second commandment);
3. Revering God's name—His reputation and character (the third commandment);
4. Honoring His day of rest and worship—the Sabbath (the fourth commandment);
5. Respecting parents (the fifth commandment);
6. Respecting life (the sixth commandment);
7. Respecting marriage (the seventh commandment);
8. Respecting people's property (the eighth commandment);
9. Respecting the reputation of others (the ninth commandment); and
10. Respecting self so that no selfish desires will mar our character (the tenth commandment).

As Jesus Himself said: “‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments’ ” (*John 14:15, ESV*; see also *1 John 4:20, 21*). Thus, true obedience is simply an expression of love and gratitude toward Jesus, a love expressed most powerfully in how we treat our neighbors.

Different Functions of God's Law

The law of God reveals God's character, who He is. As God is holy, righteous, and good, so also is His law. Paul confirms: "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (*Rom. 7:12, ESV*).

In the Bible, the law of God is seen in a very positive light (*Matt. 5:17, 18; John 14:15; 1 Cor. 7:19*). One may create poems on the law (see *Psalms 119*), sing about the law (*Psalms 19*), and meditate on it day and night (*Ps. 1:2, Josh. 1:8*). The law helps keep one from evil and gives wisdom, understanding, health, prosperity, and peace (*Deut. 4:1–6; Proverbs 2; 3*).

1. God's law is like a fence that creates a large free space for life and warns that—beyond a specific point—danger, problems, complications, and even death await (*Gen. 2:16, 17; James 2:12*).
2. The law is also a signpost pointing to Jesus, who forgives our sins and changes our lives (*2 Cor. 5:17, 1 John 1:7–9*). In this way, it leads us as a *paidagogos*, a custodian/guardian, to Christ (*Gal. 3:24*).

Read James 1:23–25. What is he saying, and how do these words help us realize what the function and importance of the law is, even though it cannot save us?

A mirror can reveal your defects, yes. But there is nothing in the mirror that can cure them. The mirror points to the problems but offers no solution to the problems. It's the same with God's law. Trying to be justified before God by keeping the law would be like staring at the mirror in hopes that, sooner or later, the mirror will make your defects go away.

Because salvation is by faith and not by works—including works of the law—some Christians claim that the law is done away with and that we no longer have to keep it. Of course, considering that the law itself is what defines sin—"I would not have known sin except through the law" (*Rom. 7:7 NKJV*)—this claim is a gross misinterpretation of the relationship of the law to the gospel. The existence of the law is precisely why we need the gospel.

How successful have you been in your attempts to obey God's law? Well enough to base your salvation on it? If not, why do you need the gospel?

The Law as God's Promise for Us

Read Romans 3:20–24. Though Paul is very clear that we cannot be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments, how then should the commandments function in our lives?

The Hebrew meaning of the term *dabarim*, used in the writing of Moses to describe the Ten Commandments (*Exod. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, Deut. 10:4*), does not literally mean “commandments,” but “words.” This “word,” *dabar* (singular), can have the meaning of a “promise.” That is why, in numerous places (*1 Kings 8:56; 2 Chron. 1:9; Neh. 5:12, 13; Deut. 1:11; Deut. 6:3; Deut. 9:28; Josh. 9:21; Josh. 22:4; Josh. 23:5*), *dabar* is translated either in a noun or verb form expressing the idea of promise.

Ellen G. White offers an insight into the function of the Decalogue: “The ten commandments . . . are ten promises.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1105. The Decalogue should be understood as promises from God that will guide us on the right path so that He can do wonderful things for us. But we must obey them.

Read Romans 10:4. How should we understand Paul's statement that Christ is the “end” of the law?

Paul states that Jesus Christ is the *telos* of the law, but not in the sense that Christ abrogates the law or does away with it. Instead, this means that Christ is the goal and intent of the law; it does not mean that His atoning sacrifice terminates the validity and perpetuity of it.

On the contrary, Paul speaks about the importance of the law, about its legitimacy, and about its enduring authority (*Rom. 3:31, 1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:6*). The meaning of the word *telos* is primarily purposeful and goal-oriented, not time related. Christ is the key to unlock the true meaning and purpose of God's law. Thus, it would be incorrect to state that Christ invalidated, superseded, or abrogated the law. Christ is the goal of the law, the One to whom it points.

How does the law point us to Jesus? That is, what does the law reveal to us about ourselves that would indeed point us to Jesus?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law Given to Israel,” pp. 303–310, and “Satan’s Enmity Against the Law,” pp. 331–342, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“God purposed to make the occasion of speaking His law a scene of awful grandeur, in keeping with its exalted character. The people were to be impressed that everything connected with the service of God must be regarded with the greatest reverence.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 303.

This principle of reverence is valid today. It springs from an understanding of God’s greatness, transcendence, and majesty. Seeing God’s glory creates gratitude in our hearts and humbles our pride. The closer we see God’s holiness, the more imperfections we will discern in our lives, leading us to thirst even more for His transforming Presence and to desire to be more like Him.

And, too, knowing what we are in contrast to Him and to His holy law makes us totally dependent upon Christ’s substitutionary death for us.

At the same time, Jesus made it clear that, if we humbly accept God as our Lord and King, His commands are not difficult to obey (*Matt. 11:28–30*). Christ made it plain that the divine law has permanent validity (*Matt. 5:17–20*). When we keep God’s laws out of love and gratitude to Him because of the salvation that He has freely bestowed upon us, we can experience the fullness of a saving relationship with Him. While enjoying the great advantages of keeping the law (after all, look at the pain and hardship that violating it brings), we also can enjoy the assurance of knowing that our salvation is found in Jesus, not in our law-keeping.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The preparation for receiving the law helped the people understand the sense of reverence they needed. Today, in our church and church life, where is there a similar sense of reverence and awe before God? Or have we somehow slowly lost it?
- ❷ Dwell more on this covenantal formula: “I will be their God, and they will be my people.” What does this mean to us today, and how should it be revealed both individually and as a corporate people?
- ❸ What God commands us to do, He enables us to do. Ellen G. White states that “all His biddings are enablings.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 333. How does one put this promise, this *dabar*, into practice?
- ❹ How are we to respond to the common argument we hear that, after the Cross, the law has been done away with? In most cases, what are they really saying has been done away with?

A Dream Comes True

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Eniah Ngulube grew up in a non-Adventist home that observed the seventh-day Sabbath in Zambia. In addition to the Sabbath, her parents' church taught that sick people should refuse medicine and instead seek prayer from church leaders. If an ill person died, church members accepted it as God's will. Many church members died of malaria and other treatable diseases.

Eniah loved her parents and their faith. But as she grew into a teen, she and a sister began going to church on Sundays. Five of her other siblings joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church and kept worshiping on Saturdays. Their parents didn't mind which church the children attended.

As a teen, Eniah also wanted to become a nurse. Even though she had been raised to reject medicine, she wanted to care for the sick. She dreamed of studying at Mwami Adventist School of Nursing in the town of Chipata, located about 20 miles away from her home. When she finished high school, she shared her desire with her brother, Kenson, who was an Adventist church elder. Kenson liked the idea of his sister studying in an Adventist school, and he contacted the president of the East Zambia Field to ask when the school would open enrollment for the next school year. Learning that enrollment had ended, he pleaded for a place for his sister. The East Zambia Field president, Moses Banda, called the school and discovered that it was unlikely that she would get in. Classes were packed. But a day or two later, the school found a place for her. Eniah couldn't believe it, especially because she was not a Seventh-day Adventist. Her dream had come true!

A week after her arrival, the school held a week of spiritual emphasis. Her heart was stirred as she listened to the speaker, Zambian police chaplain Godfrey Sianga, talk about baptism. She had not been baptized by immersion. She thought, *Let me get baptized like Jesus. He's coming soon.* At the end of the week, Eniah was baptized and joined the Adventist Church.

Eniah is among many students who have grown in their knowledge of Jesus at Mwami Adventist School of Nursing, said Emmanuel Mwale, Adventist Mission coordinator for the East Zambia Field. "Like Eniah, many non-Adventist students are coming to Mwami Adventist School of Nursing and receiving Jesus," he said. "The Mwami Adventist School of Nursing actively shares the love of Jesus with new students every year."



Pray for the gospel to be proclaimed in Zambia and other countries in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, the recipient of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

Living *the* Law



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 21:1–32, Exod. 22:16–23:33, 2 Kings 19:35, Matt. 5:38–48, Rom. 12:19, Matt. 16:27.*

Memory Text: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves” ’ ” (*Exodus 20:22, 23, NKJV*).

God desired His people to be different from the surrounding nations. He wanted them established as a devoted community of faith who would live under His leadership and authority. Everyone would be subject to His law. Judges were to be appointed as administrators of the law, and the priests were to teach it. Parents also played a crucial role.

In any culture, the laws reveal the ideals, goals, intent, and character of the lawmaker. For example, when Pharaoh ordered every Hebrew male baby killed, this law revealed what he was like: evil. In contrast, if a king made a law that every 18-year-old in the kingdom would be awarded a free higher education, many would consider this evidence of the king's generosity and desire for his country to prosper.

God's law reveals Him, that is, His goodness, love, values, righteousness, and His restraints against evil. As the law is holy and just, so is God. While creating space for an abundant life, the law also helps protect us from dangers and calamities. Respect for God, for each other, and for life's values were the basis of His legislative system.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 30.

The Code of the Covenant

At Sinai, with the giving of His law, God set the foundation for teaching His people how, through connection with Him, they could live holy lives. But the principles of the law needed to be applied in everyday life, so God gave them additional laws, the so-called “Code of the Covenant.” It was the responsibility of judges to watch over these laws and to apply them correctly.

“The minds of the people, blinded and debased by slavery and heathenism, were not prepared to appreciate fully the far-reaching principles of God's ten precepts. That the obligations of the Decalogue might be more fully understood and enforced, additional precepts were given, illustrating and applying the principles of the Ten Commandments. These laws were called judgments, both because they were framed in infinite wisdom and equity and because the magistrates were to give judgment according to them. Unlike the Ten Commandments, they were delivered privately to Moses, who was to communicate them to the people.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 310.

Read Exodus 21:1–32. What specific regulations were given regarding Hebrew slaves, homicide, and bodily injuries?

The Code of the Covenant is described in several chapters (*Exod. 21:1–23:19*). All these regulations and laws were issued to stop the avalanche of evil and to build an orderly society.

The slavery laws were special and should not be confused with the vicious and evil practice of modern or medieval slavery. Hebrew slaves were, in fact, protected and valued. In modern and medieval societies, servants and slaves were the property of their owner, who could do whatever they wished with them. In contrast, biblical laws regulated things differently. Servitude was limited to six years (*Exod. 21:1, 2; Jer. 34:8–22*), and in the seventh year, all slaves had to be liberated unless they wanted to stay with their master. Masters also had to give them Sabbaths off (*Exod. 20:9, 10*) and provide for their basic needs.

Though, in most of the world, the evil practice of institutionalized slavery has for the most part been abolished, what are ways in which some of the principles of it still exist, and what can we do, in our own limited sphere, to fight against these principles?

More Laws

In God's mercy, He taught the judges how to deal with people in various situations regarding property rights. Several case studies are enumerated, indicating what to do if a bull attacked a neighbor's bull, if people stole a domestic animal and sold it, if animals grazed in the field or vineyard of another owner, if an item a person borrowed was stolen from him, or if a hired animal was injured or died (*Exod. 21:33–22:15*).

Read Exodus 22:16–23:9. What issues were dealt with in these laws and how?

God's laws included different issues. There were specific regulations against putting down or humiliating people. He did not want any kind of exploitation. In His mercy, God corrects the sinful tendencies of the human heart and restrains people's natural inclinations. Society was to be kept safe, evil eliminated, and good interpersonal relationships cultivated. Justice and love must rule all actions.

Read Exodus 23:10–19. What important issues were dealt with here?

The Sabbath and the festivals were about worship and were reminders of crucial events in salvation history. Worship was carefully regulated because this was the theological basis for all other activities. The Sabbath was established at Creation (*Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:8–11*), was connected to Israel's deliverance and redemption (*Deut. 5:12–15*), and, in a powerful way, points to worshiping God as our Creator, Redeemer, and Lord (*Mark 2:27, 28*).

Meanwhile, there were three crucial festivals that Israel was required to celebrate each year: (1) the Passover or the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring (usually about mid-March to mid-April); (2) Pentecost or the Feast of Harvest (or the Feast of Weeks) seven weeks after the previous festival, thus beginning 50 days later; and (3) the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) or the Feast of Ingathering in the fall (usually about mid-September to mid-October; *see also Exod. 34:18–26, Lev. 23:4–44, Num. 28:16–29:40, Deut. 16:1–16*).

God's Original Plan

Read Exodus 23:20–33. What methods did God desire to use for conquering the Promised Land?

It was not God's intention for the Israelites to fight for their new territory; it was to be given to them. It had been promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and should have been received as God's special gift to Israel.

The model for the conquest of the Promised Land was demonstrated during the crossing of the Red Sea. God fought for His people and gave them total victory over those planning to kill them (*Exod. 14:13, 14*). The Egyptians were defeated because the Lord miraculously intervened. Similarly, in the time of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, God also defeated the vast, heavily equipped, and well-trained Assyrian army, but without the Israelites having to fight. God granted victory because King Hezekiah believed God's word given to him through the prophet Isaiah (*2 Kings 19:35, Isa. 37:36*).

God informed Abraham that the Promised Land would not be immediately given to his posterity, but only after 400 years (*Gen. 15:13–16*). Why? The reason was related to the wickedness of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. God was mercifully working with those people and gave them another period of grace to repent. However, they continued in their rebellion against God and His values, so when the iniquity of those nations was complete, God was ready to give their territory to the Hebrews as a new homeland.

In addition, God promised that He would drive the nations out ahead of Israel by two unusual but very effective methods: (1) by sending terror and fear upon wicked nations, and (2) with hornets that would drive the people away. Before the Israelites arrived in the new territory, their enemies would abandon the place, and "turn their backs and run" (*Exod. 23:27, 28, NIV*).

The crucial role in the conquest of the Promised Land is played by the Angel of God. This Messenger was Christ, who guided Israel, conquered territories, and protected them. He was the pillar of cloud guiding them during the day and the pillar of fire during the night. Israel had to pay careful attention and listen to Him because He had divine authority (*Exod. 23:21*). Defiance of God's will and unbelief in His leadership would complicate their advancement.

What does this idea, that of God giving those pagans many years to change their ways, teach us about God's grace and also about the limits of that grace for those who refuse to accept it?

An Eye for an Eye

Read Matthew 5:38–48. How does Jesus interpret the meaning of the retaliation law? How should we apply it today?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ cited texts from the Old Testament, texts that people were surely familiar with. However, He was speaking against the current rabbinical interpretations, which over the centuries had moved away from the original purpose of these laws. That is, human tradition not only hid the purpose of God's Word but in some cases (think of the Sabbath regulations and what they had done to the Sabbath commandment) had perverted their intent and meanings. By His words, Jesus was restoring the original meanings of these laws.

On the Mount of Beatitudes, by pointing His hearers back to the texts' original intent and meaning, Jesus was seeking to correct some of these false interpretations.

The text from Exodus 21:24 that talks about an "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" was quoted in Matthew 5:38 ("you have heard . . . but I say to you") and referred to the *lex talionis*, the so-called retaliation law. This verse is also used in other places in the Bible (*Lev. 24:20, Deut. 19:21*).

The original intention of this law was formulated against any personal revenge. It was to stop blood feuds, or retaliation without an investigation first. Injury had to be evaluated by judges, and then a proper monetary compensation would be established and paid. This practice was done in order to stop people from "taking the law into their own hands." Justice was to be done, but it had to be done according to God's law.

Jesus Christ, who gave these social laws to Moses, knew the purpose of this law; therefore, He could apply it in an objective way, according to its original intention. The motive behind it was to bring justice and reconciliation, and to restore peace.

One could argue that, in a sense, justice implies a kind of vengeance. The proper application of these laws was, it seemed, an attempt to find the right balance between the ideas of justice and vengeance.

How should the realization that one day justice will come help you deal with all the injustice that we see in the world now?

Vengeance

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’ ” (Rom. 12:19, *ESV*; see also Deut. 32:35).

What promise and command are found in these verses, and how are they closely related?

Until the Lord brings the justice so lacking now, it was the duty of the judges in ancient Israel to implement the law and to determine a just punishment when harm or injury occurred. But they needed the facts first. The problem was that the teachers of the law in Christ’s time applied this law in a way that opened the door for personal vengeance. By doing so, the principle was taken out of its context, and the initial purpose was missed. Consequently, they were defending what the law actually forbade.

Read Matthew 6:4, 6; Matthew 16:27; Luke 6:23; and 2 Timothy 4:8. What do these texts tell us about how Jesus viewed the principles of reward and punishment?

Jesus was not against the principle of reward and punishment. Justice is a matter of principle; it is a crucial part of life. However, no individual is to take the role of judge, jury, and “executioner” upon himself or herself. How easy it would be for us to pervert justice! It is not up to us to repay harm. If some evil is to be addressed, this must be performed by an objective court; it is the work of judges.

In this context Jesus tells us to be as perfect as our “Father in heaven is perfect.” How can we be as perfect as God Himself? Unselfish love is the overarching characteristic of God. He teaches His followers how to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them. True perfection is to love, to be forgiving, and to be merciful (*Luke 6:36*), even to those who do not deserve it. This principle, and the actions it leads to, is what it means to reflect God’s character.

What are ways in which, day by day, we can learn to love in the way that we are commanded to? Why does this always involve a death to self?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law Given to Israel,” pp. 310–314, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Because we live in the territory of our enemy, it is no wonder we may be hurt in real life by his skillful and deceptive schemes. Who among us has not known pain and suffering, all brought about because of sin and the sinful fallen world in which we live? It’s just part of life now, unfortunately. However, God gives us power to cope.

“The precious Saviour will send help just when we need it. The way to heaven is consecrated by His footprints. Every thorn that wounds our feet has wounded His. Every cross that we are called to bear He has borne before us. The Lord permits conflicts, to prepare the soul for peace. The time of trouble is a fearful ordeal for God’s people; but it is the time for every true believer to look up, and by faith he may see the bow of promise encircling him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 633.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ People through the centuries have struggled with the fact that the Lord had those pagan nations driven out of their land, and sometimes even wiped out. It is, indeed, troubling. However, how should realizing that God’s love must also manifest justice help us trust that, even in these events, His love, not just His justice, was revealed?
- ❷ Dwell more on the fact that right after all Jesus’ words about loving others, even our enemies, and even those who hate you, He says to us, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (*Matt. 5:48, NKJV*). Why would Jesus have this command follow right after these other commands? What was He telling us here about what it means not only to be “perfect” but to be as perfect as “your Father in heaven”?
- ❸ The apostle Paul had a positive and uplifting attitude toward God’s law and its functions, yet he was against the misuse of the law. What does his statement mean that “you are not under the law, but under grace” (*Rom. 6:14, NIV*)? What are ways that we can misuse the law?
- ❹ What is the difference between justice and vengeance? Are they completely different concepts or just different manifestations of the same idea? How do we know if our desire for justice is not really a desire for vengeance?

All Things Working Together

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Carl Casey, a helicopter pilot and science teacher in Alaska, had a stroke at the age of 51. He couldn't understand why. Long before becoming a Seventh-day Adventist, he had stopped eating unclean meat after seeing that the Bible spoke against it and reading scientific evidence that backed it up.

The stroke shattered Carl's life in Fairbanks. He couldn't walk or work.

Then he read in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (*NKJV*). He had read the verse many times, but now it took on a new meaning. He saw it didn't say "all things are good for those who love God" but rather "all things work together for good to those who love God."

Carl stopped asking why. Instead, he asked God to use his stroke to win souls in Alaska. He wanted to be able to echo Joseph and say, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (*Gen. 50:20*).

Carl began to look for opportunities to witness in Alaska, which is a challenging mission field with a difficult history; long, cold winters; and limited roads and other infrastructure across a vast territory. Only about 3,000 Adventists live among the population of 733,000. Carl quickly realized that his wheelchair put him in a unique position. It was hard for people not to notice him. With their attention, he spoke glowingly about his love for God.

People responded with surprise. "You're in a wheelchair, and you care about God?" they asked.

"You betcha!" Carl replied. Then he extolled God's great love. He shared Romans 3:23, which says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and John 3:16, which says all who believe in Jesus have eternal life. He encouraged people to read the Bible daily and grow close to God, believing that once a relationship was formed, everything else would fall into place, including doctrines like the Sabbath and teachings such as the Levitical diet.

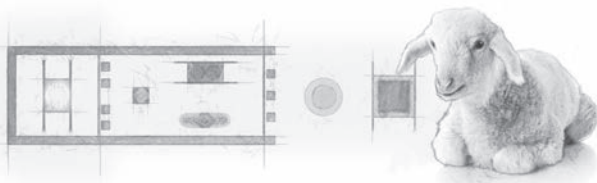
Carl readily admits that a healthy diet didn't prevent his stroke. "My stroke was not from eating unhealthily but just the result of living in a sinful world," he said. "I'm lucky to be alive. Most people die after a stroke like this." He still recommends and follows the Levitical diet as the path to a longer, healthier life.



Nearly a decade after his stroke, he can say that lives have been changed because of the stroke.

"I will see people in heaven because I had this stroke," Carl said. "People will be there who wouldn't have been there otherwise. So, all things work together for good to those who love God."

The Covenant *and the* Blueprint



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 24:1–18; 1 Cor. 11:23–29; Lev. 10:1, 2; Ezek. 36:26–28; Exod. 25:1–9; Exod. 31:1–18.*

Memory Text: “So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has said we will do’ ” (*Exodus 24:3, NKJV*).

As their God, Creator, and Redeemer, the Lord desired to be with His people and to dwell in their midst. He created us to be in close fellowship with Him. Yet, if meaningful relationships with other people can be built only with time and effort, the same is true with our vertical relationship with God. It can be an uplifting and growth-filled experience, but only if we spend time with Him. In practical terms, this means studying His Word (God speaking to us), praying (opening our hearts to God), and witnessing to others about Christ's death, resurrection, and return (engaging in God's mission). As God blesses us, we will be a channel of blessings to others.

The focus should be on God, not on ourselves (*Heb. 12:1, 2*). By our connecting with Him, God can empower us to follow His teachings, which means obedience to His Word. No wonder the end-time generation of Christ's followers are described as people “who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*).

It's simple, really: we love God, and, out of that love, we obey Him.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 6.

The Book and the Blood

Read Exodus 24:1–8. What roles do the reading of the Word of God and the sprinkling of blood play in the ratification of the covenant between God and His people?

The living God of the Bible is the God of relationships. The important element for our Lord is not a thing or an agenda but the person. Thus, God pays close attention to people, and the primary purpose of His activities is to build a personal relationship with humans. After all, a God who “is love” would have to be a God who did care about relationships, for how can there be love without relationships?

Jesus said: “ ‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself’ ” (*John 12:32, ESV*). God is interested not only in our ethical behavior, right doctrine, or in a set of proper actions, but, above all, in a personal, intimate relationship with us. Both Creation institutions (*Genesis 1, 2*) are about *relationship*: the first about the vertical relationship with God (the Sabbath) and the second about the horizontal relationship between humans (marriage).

The ratification of the covenant at Sinai was to reinforce the special relationship that God wanted to have with His people. In the ceremony, the people twice shouted that they would obey God in everything that He required. “Everything the LORD has said we will do,” they proclaimed (*Exod. 24:3, NIV*). They meant it, too, but they did not know their brokenness, fragility, and lack of power. The blood of the covenant was sprinkled on the people, indicating that only by Christ’s merits was Israel able to follow God’s instructions.

We do not want to accept that our human nature is fragile, weak, and thoroughly sinful. We have an inherent tendency toward evil. To be able to do good, we must have help from outside ourselves. This help comes only from above, from the power of God’s grace, from His Word, and from the Holy Spirit. And even with all this at our disposal, evil still comes so easily to us, does it not?

That’s why a close personal relationship with God was as essential to the people then, at Sinai, as it is to us today.

“Everything the LORD has said we will do” (*Exod. 24:3, NIV*). How many times have you said the same thing, only to fail? What is the only solution?

Seeing God

Read Exodus 24:9–18. What amazing experience were the children of Israel given here?

After the firm reestablishment of the covenant with God, Moses again climbed Sinai. In the beginning of this climb, Moses was not alone. He had the excellent company of 73 Israelite leaders. For the leaders, this was the pinnacle experience: they saw God (theophany), and twice the text underlines this amazing reality. It was also a time for the leaders, by eating together, to seal the covenant with God. This was a banquet, and the God of Israel was their Host. These leaders were deeply honored by God.

In the Middle East during biblical times (and to a certain extent today), eating together was a high experience, great honor, and privilege. It offered forgiveness and formed a bond of friendship. It implied being there for each other and staying together in times of crisis and problems. By eating together, they promised each other, without words, that if something should happen to one party, the other would be obliged to come and help. To be invited to a meal was a special treat that was not extended to everyone.

Meanwhile, to refuse an invitation was one of the worst kinds of insults. This insight helps us to understand the stories in the New Testament in which Jesus Christ was heavily criticized for eating with sinners (*Luke 5:30*). When believers celebrate the Lord's Supper, they also establish this close bond with other believers who are sinners like themselves. During this meal, we celebrate the forgiveness and salvation that we have in Jesus (*see Matt. 26:26–30, Mark 14:22–25, 1 Cor. 11:23–29*).

Tragically, some of the men who had gone up with Moses later fell into sin and lost their lives (*see Lev. 10:1, 2, 9*). Even though they had such a deep experience with God there, they were not transformed or converted by that experience. What a powerful lesson about how possession of truth and sacred privileges does not automatically mean conversion. Having experienced what they did, these men should have been the last ones to have done what they would later tragically do.

Dwell more on the story of these very privileged men, even sons of Aaron. What warning should this give to us, as Adventists, who, with the light we have been entrusted with, are indeed privileged?

Power to Obey

Read Ezekiel 36:26–28. How does obedience take place in our lives?

On three occasions, the Israelites fervently declared that they would obey God (*Exod. 19:8; Exod. 24:3, 7*). Obedience is important, even if the Bible teaches that we humans are weak, broken, fragile, and sinful. This sad truth has been revealed not only through the history of ancient Israel but through the history of all His people.

How, then, are we enabled to follow God faithfully?

The good news is that what God commands, He empowers us to do. The help that is not inside of us comes from outside, enabling us to do what God requires. It is His work. In the core of his theological summary in Ezekiel 36:26, 27, the prophet Ezekiel makes this point very clear. Only God can perform a heart transplant, and He does so by removing our heart of stone and replacing it with a sensitive heart of flesh. As Joshua reminded his audience: “ ‘You are not able to serve the LORD’ ” (*Josh. 24:19, NIV*).

We can decide to follow God; that is our role. We have to make the choice, the moment-by-moment choice to surrender to Him. And that is because we do not have the power to fulfill even our conscious choice to serve Him. But when we give our weakness to God, He will make us strong. Paul says: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (*2 Cor. 12:10, NKJV*).

Notice the divine “I” in Ezekiel 36:24–30: God gathers, cleanses, removes, gives, puts, and moves you to carefully keep His law. What He is doing, you will do. He identifies with you, and if you associate closely with Him, His doing will be your doing. The unity between God and you will be dynamic, powerful, and lively.

Again, the emphasis in this passage is on God’s doing. The literal translation reads: “I will give my Spirit in you, and I will do that you will walk in my statutes and keep my laws, and you will do.” God commands people to obey and then gives the power to obey. What God requires of His people, He always helps them to do. Obedience is God’s gift (not just our performance or achievement), just as justification and salvation are His gifts too (*Phil. 2:13*).

If we have been promised the power to obey, why do we find it so easy to fall into sin anyway?

In the Midst of His People

God was teaching His people through various means, and one of them was through the sanctuary. All its services pointed to Jesus; they were object lessons in the plan of salvation, which would be wrought out through Jesus many centuries later.

Read Exodus 25:1–9. What crucial, practical, and theological truths are seen in these verses?

Even though God was leading the Israelites and already was close to them, He instructed Moses to build a sanctuary:

“ ‘Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them’ ” (*Exod. 25:8, NIV*). God wanted to show them tangibly that He indeed was with them. Even though they had done wrong many times, He had not forsaken them, and “after they were again taken into favor with Heaven” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 343), they were given the divine command, and the process of building the sanctuary began.

The Bible assures us that God does not live in human-made temples and buildings (*Acts 7:47–50*) because He is bigger than the heaven of heavens, and heaven cannot contain Him. Paul at Areopagus in Athens states: “ ‘The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands’ ” (*Acts 17:24, NIV*). Also, King Solomon states: “ ‘But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!’ ” (*1 Kings 8:27, ESV*). The sanctuary was to be where God would manifest His presence to them.

The Israelites were to bring a voluntary offering for the building of the sanctuary. They were to give precious and expensive gifts, including gold, silver, bronze, acacia wood, various kinds of fine cloth, olive oil, and spices.

In Exodus 25:10–27:21, we are given many details about the tabernacle and its services. God provided Moses with a blueprint containing specific instructions on how to build and furnish the tabernacle, including the ark of the covenant, the shewbread table, the lampstand, the altars, the curtains, the colors, and the measurements.

Moses had to build the tabernacle according to the pattern God showed him (*Exod. 25:9, 40; Exod. 26:30*), which was a reflection of the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 8:1, 2; Heb. 9:11*). The earthly sanctuary had served a crucial function until the death of Jesus and His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, which rendered the earthly sanctuary null and void, a truth symbolized by the rending of the curtain before the Most Holy Place at Christ’s death (*Matt. 27:51, Mark 15:38*).

Filled With the Spirit of God

God instructed Moses on every detail in preparation for the tabernacle's services. Priests were to have priestly garments, but the high priest wore a special ephod, which contained the names of the sons of Israel. He also wore a breastplate, which contained the Urim and Thummim and was to be on his heart (*Exodus 28*). All priests were to be consecrated (*Exodus 29*). Other items to be carefully prepared were the altar of incense, the basin for washing, the anointing oil, and the incense (*Exodus 30*).

Read *Exodus 31:1–18*. What special assistance did God give so that all the tabernacle's details and related services would be prepared and built in a beautiful and proper way?

For the first time in the Scriptures, one reads that God would fill a person with the Spirit of God. What does that mean? Bezalel was empowered to work artistically on the tabernacle. He was filled, i.e., equipped with new skills, understanding, and knowledge on the needed craftsmanship. Additionally, God gave Aholiab and many other craftsmen the same Spirit to assist in this work.

In the midst of all this creativity, God's Sabbath is presented as a sign between God and His people that the Lord makes them holy. It means that the observance of the fourth commandment is associated with sanctification. Ezekiel later observed: "I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them" (*Ezek. 20:12, ESV*).

The Sabbath is a reminder that the Lord is not only our Creator (*Gen. 2:2, 3*), Redeemer, and God (*Deut. 5:15; Mark 2:27, 28*) but also the Holy One. He transforms people by His presence; through His Spirit and Word, they grow to reflect a loving, kind, unselfish, and forgiving character.

The culminating present that God gave to Moses was the Decalogue (*Exod. 31:18*). God Himself wrote and gave the two stone tablets with the ten precepts (*Exod. 31:18, Deut. 9:9–11*). These tablets were to be placed in the Most Holy Place and inside the ark of the covenant, which was under the mercy seat (*Exod. 25:21*).

The phrase "mercy seat" comes from one Hebrew word, whose root meaning is "to atone." Why, then, would this "mercy seat" be set right over God's law? What hope should we see in this fact?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 343–353, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

The tabernacle was a special place where atonement was accomplished for the confessed sins of God’s people. It was the place where, indeed, the entire plan of salvation had been revealed, and in some detail, too, to the children of Israel while they were in the wilderness. Justification, sanctification, and judgment were all taught there. Every animal sacrifice pointed to the death of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, and, eventually, the blotting out of sins. And, too, along with the sacrifices was the presence of God’s law, the standard of righteousness.

“The law of God, enshrined within the ark, was the great rule of righteousness and judgment. That law pronounced death upon the transgressor; but above the law was the mercy seat, upon which the presence of God was revealed, and from which, by virtue of the atonement, pardon was granted to the repentant sinner. Thus in the work of Christ for our redemption, symbolized by the sanctuary service, ‘mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.’ Psalm 85:10.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 349.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How many times have you said, “All that the Lord tells me to do, I will do”? How successful were you in your efforts?
- ❷ At the end of Moses’ 40-day stay with the Lord on Mount Sinai, God emphasized that the Israelites must observe His Sabbath, because it would be a sign between God and them that it was the Lord who would make them holy. What role do holiness and sanctification play in keeping the Sabbath?
- ❸ The Lord wanted them to make a sanctuary so that “I may dwell among them.” How fascinating that this place was the center of salvation for Israel. It was here—in this sanctuary, where God dwelt among His people—that the plan of salvation was wrought out in types and shadows. What does this tell us about our total dependence upon God for salvation?
- ❹ What does it mean that through the blood all their sins were brought to the sanctuary, God’s house? How does this amazing truth reflect, even if dimly, what Jesus did on the cross for us and what He is doing for us now in the heavenly sanctuary?

Knowing an All-Knowing God

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Iqbal didn't know anything about Jesus when he traveled more than 600 miles from his home to learn English at a Seventh-day Adventist boarding high school in southern Asia.

He had been raised in a non-Christian family, and his parents sent him at the age of 20 to join his sister at the school. She was studying there and excelling in her English classes.

Iqbal attended all the school's morning and evening worship services. He went to all the Sabbath services. An interest began to beat in his heart to know Jesus. He read the Bible, looking for information about Jesus. His eyes were drawn to Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you" (NKJV).

He thought, *I want to know Jesus personally because He knew me personally before He formed me in my mother's womb.*

Weeks turned into months, and Iqbal learned more about Jesus. He thought, *Could it be that Jesus brought me more than 600 miles from my home not only to learn English but also to learn about His love?*

He began to experience Jesus' love in his own life, and two and a half years after arriving at the school, he decided to give his heart to Jesus and be baptized.

After graduating from the school, Iqbal went on to receive a Bachelor of Computer Applications from Lowry Adventist College in Bengaluru, India, and to join its staff, where he works in campus ministry activities. Jesus is his life.

"Now, I'm happy to live with Jesus," he said. "Day by day, Jesus leads me and takes care of me. Whenever I face a problem, Jesus Christ is my refuge and brings me out of the problem."

Iqbal expressed astonishment at the omniscience of Jesus, the idea that Jesus not only knew him before forming him in his mother's womb but also knows the needs that he has before he himself is aware of them.



"I thank Jesus that He takes care of my needs long before I even know about them," he said. "Before I ask, He knows what to give and through whom to give it. This is the reason I trust in Him and love Him more each day."

Lowry Adventist College received part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2024 to open an English church. Thank you for your mission offerings that support vital projects around the world.

Apostasy and Intercession



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 32:1–6; Ps. 115:4–8; Isa. 44:9, 10; Rom. 1:22–27; Exod. 32:7–32; Isa. 53:4.*

Memory Text: “Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, ‘Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written’ ” (*Exodus 32:31, 32, NKJV*).

Moses had been absent from the camp of Israel for only 40 days, and what happened? God's people had turned away from Him and worshiped a human-made idol, a golden calf. After so many mighty signs, experiences, and miracles, how could they have done that?

There could be many answers, and perhaps some truth in them all. Did the people not understand who God really was? Or were their powerful experiences with Him overshadowed by their carnal and sinful desires? Did they not appreciate what God had done for them and, instead, took it all for granted? Was their understanding clouded, marred by their everyday preoccupations and old sinful thinking? Were they simply ungrateful for God's merciful actions on their behalf? Had they so quickly forgotten the mighty acts of God (*Ps. 106:13, 21–23*)? Or could it all be blamed on Aaron's failed leadership? “ ‘The LORD was very angry with Aaron and would have destroyed him’ ” (*Deut. 9:20, NKJV*).

Whatever the reasons for this terrible apostasy, what lessons can we draw from it, not only about human sinfulness but about God's gracious love for humans, despite their sinfulness?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 13.

Failed Leadership

God called Moses to spend time with Him. Forty days and forty nights might have been a short period for Moses, but it seemed long, too long, for the Israelites. Their visible leader was absent. They became disoriented, impatient, fearful, and insecure. They wanted to have a visible god who would lead them, the “gods” whom they had seen all their lives in idolatrous Egypt.

Read Exodus 32:1–6. How was it possible for Aaron’s leadership to fail so spectacularly?

Aaron did not rise to the occasion. He failed to seize the moment and do what was right. Instead of trusting the Lord, he wilted before the majority. The people demanded the unthinkable: “‘Come, make us a god who will go before us’ ” (*Exod. 32:1, NASB*), and he consented.

People willingly gave gold to make the idol, and Aaron not only did not stop them but, in fact, he invited them to donate. He then participated in the molding of this false god. Afterward, the people declared: “This is your god, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (*Exod. 32:4, NASB*). So sinful, wicked, and shortsighted. They had just fabricated this idol and then stated that it, the idol, had delivered them. Isn’t it amazing how sinful desires can pervert our thinking and actions? People celebrate their own creations, and their humanity and morality become debased in the process.

“Such a crisis demanded a man of firmness, decision, and unflinching courage; one who held the honor of God above popular favor, personal safety, or life itself. But the present leader of Israel was not of this character. Aaron feebly remonstrated with the people, but his wavering and timidity at the critical moment only rendered them the more determined. The tumult increased. A blind, unreasoning frenzy seemed to take possession of the multitude. There were some who remained true to their covenant with God, but the greater part of the people joined in the apostasy. Aaron feared for his own safety; and instead of nobly standing up for the honor of God, he yielded to the demands of the multitude.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 316, 317.

How could Aaron, a leader, have been so weak? In what ways might Aaron have sought to justify in his own heart his terrible actions?

Idolatry and Evil

Read Exodus 32:6. Where did their idolatry quickly lead them? (See also Ps. 115:4–8; Ps. 135:15–18; Isa. 44:9, 10.)

The golden calf resembled the Egyptian bull god, called Apis, or cow god, called Hathor. This was a blatant transgression of the first and second commandments (*Exod. 20:3–6*). This violation could not go unpunished because it openly broke their relationship with the living Lord. Instead of worshiping their Creator, the Israelites worshiped their own creation, which could not see, hear, smell, speak, care, love, or lead.

The Creation order was reversed: instead of understanding that they had been created in God's image, they now made a god, not even in their own image—which would have been bad enough—but *in the image of an animal*. This was the god whom they wanted to serve? Thus, they had greatly sinned against the Lord (*Isa. 31:7, Isa. 42:17*).

In what ways does the golden calf apostasy reflect what is written in Romans 1:22–27?

Idolatry denies the theological understanding that God is God and man is man. Idolatry erases the gap between God and man (*Eccles. 5:2*) and breaks the connection with Him. Whether it is blatant and open or something concealed in the heart, idolatry quickly ruptures our relationship with the Lord and leads in a downward moral spiral. No wonder the text talks about what they did the next day: after offering sacrifices to the idol, they then began to party, in what Ellen G. White depicted as “an imitation of the idolatrous feasts of Egypt.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 320.

Humans are geniuses at fabricating their own idols. They create their own gods, which is bad enough, but then they go and serve those gods. The Creator is replaced with things that, sooner or later, lead to moral degeneration.

What are ways today that humans worship the creation instead of the Creator?

Corrupting Themselves

Read Exodus 32:7, 8. Why did God send Moses back to the camp of Israel?

By turning to an idol, the Israelites were in the process of divorcing themselves from the true God, the One who had delivered them from Egypt. The Lord squarely placed the blame on them, saying that they have “corrupted themselves” (*Exod. 32:7, NKJV*)—even crediting this statue with having delivered them from Egypt. What a direct contradiction to what God said to them (*Exod. 20:2*)! This denial of God’s presence and mighty acts was a serious matter. Their thinking and feelings were distorted and completely corrupted.

For the prophet Ezekiel, idolatry lay at the core of all the misery of God’s people, and from there springs all other sins (*see, for example, Ezek. 8:1–18, Ezek. 20:1–44, Ezek. 22:1–12*). We often wonder why ancient believers were so naïve and uncorrectable when they engaged in worshiping different human-made idols. We are quite sure that we would never do something like that. Are we really free of idols? The idols of today may have different shapes and forms, yet they have a similar appeal.

An idol is something that replaces God, and even though we know it is not right, we still worship it, often repeatedly. It captures our imagination, affection, time, and mind more than does God. It can even enslave our thinking. In fact, we become what we behold, and we will rise no higher than whatever “god” we serve.

If God is not at the center of your life, then other gods will fill His place. If we do not enjoy and cultivate God’s living Presence, we will enjoy and devote our lives to something or someone else. What we substitute for Christ may have different appearances: pride, self-centeredness, money, power, sex, food, TV, drugs, alcohol, impure thoughts, pornography, pleasures, work, sports, family, video games, films, shopping, ideas, politics, music, position, titles, grades, and so forth. The list has no end.

We are very creative and inventive in this regard. We can turn anything that is good, beautiful, and meaningful into an idol. Idolatry is extremely dangerous because it transforms our personality, our way of thinking, our affections, and our social life. It changes our identity and replaces genuine personal relationships with hollow and ultimately meaningless interactions that, in the end, cannot save us.

God's Righteous Wrath

Read Exodus 32:9–29. What was Moses' reaction to God's threat to destroy Israel?

While Moses was still on Mount Sinai, God said that He would destroy the rebels and make Moses' posterity into a great nation. But that was not what Moses wanted. Instead, he pleaded with the Lord, pointing out that the Israelites were not Moses' people—they were God's. He, Moses himself, had not brought them out of Egypt, but God had done it through His mighty works. And so Moses pled with God, stressing His early promises to the fathers. Moses was truly working as an intercessor between God and humanity.

After the "LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (*Exod. 32:14, NKJV*), Moses returned to them. There is no record—unlike what would happen in Exodus 34:29, 30—that his face shone from the presence of the Lord. His face probably reflected his anger.

"When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain" (*Exod. 32:19, NIV*). Breaking the tablets containing the Decalogue was an external sign of breaking its content. God rebuked Moses for it, but later He commanded Moses to chisel two tablets to replace " 'the first tablets, which you broke' " (*Deut. 10:2, NKJV*). God Himself would rewrite the commands.

Moses sharply rebuked Aaron for surrendering to the demands of the people. " 'What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?' " (*Exod. 32:21, NIV*). Aaron tried to excuse his transgression by (1) blaming others, and (2) by magic: " 'I threw it [the gold] into the fire, and out came this calf!' " (*Exod. 32:24, NIV*). What made matters worse was that Aaron himself had been greatly honored of God, having been given many privileges, which included going on the mountain with Moses and the 70 elders (*Exod. 24:1*).

What a dark irony! By claiming that a miracle had happened, Aaron wanted to trick his brother (notice how one sin leads to another; in this case, idolatry to lying). However, Moses was not fooled as he saw how wildly the people behaved. The negative consequences were evident, and Moses had to stop the rebellion immediately.

What should this story teach us about the power of intercessory prayer? Whom should you be praying for right now?

Intercession

Read Exodus 32:30–32. How far did Moses go in his intercessory prayer for sinners?

Because of their rebellion, terrible things happened in the Israelite camp, including the deaths of many people (*Exod. 32:28*). The following day, Moses declared to the people: “ ‘You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin’ ” (*Exod. 32:30, NKJV*).

“Moses went back to the LORD and said, ‘Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written’ ” (*Exod. 32:31, 32, NIV*).

No wonder Moses is considered to be a type of Christ! Because of his intercessory prayer for sinners and his willingness to offer his own life for them, he surely reflected what Christ would do for all of us. What an exemplary compassion for transgressors! He demonstrated his total dedication to the Lord and His sacrificial love for people. The book of Exodus does not state how long Moses stayed with the Lord on the mount this particular time, but the book of Deuteronomy reveals that he was on Sinai this time for 40 days (*see Deut. 9:18*).

In Exodus 32:32, the word translated “forgive” is from a verb whose basic meaning is to “bear” or “carry,” such as in Isaiah 53:4, which reads (about Jesus): “Surely He has borne our griefs” (*NKJV*). It is the same verb—translated “forgive” in Exodus 32:32, and “borne” in Isaiah 53:4. What a powerful insight into the process of salvation and forgiveness and what it cost God to save us.

Indeed, Moses was asking the Lord to “bear” the people’s sin, which of course is what He did at the cross thousands of years later. Exodus 32:32 shows not only the idea of substitutionary atonement but also who does the substituting: God Himself.

This text shows how forgiveness comes. God in Christ bore our sins, the only way we could be forgiven them. What a powerful expression of the plan of salvation and a demonstration to us and to the cosmos about what it cost God to save us.

Moses asks God Himself to bear the sins of the people, and eventually, in Jesus, He does just that. How do we wrap our minds around this amazing truth? What does it tell us about God’s love for fallen humanity?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Idolatry at Sinai,” pp. 315–327, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

This week’s lesson presents a special focus on God’s work in believers. The Lord can do in us “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (*Eph. 3:20, NIV*). We should not focus on ourselves and gratify our personal desires, because this leads to idolatry. Instead, our attention should be on God and His power. He gives the strength, which leads to a new and victorious life (*Phil. 4:13; Jude 1:24, 25*).

“Love no less than justice demanded that for this sin judgment should be inflicted. God is the guardian as well as the sovereign of His people. He cuts off those who are determined upon rebellion, that they may not lead others to ruin. In sparing the life of Cain, God had demonstrated to the universe what would be the result of permitting sin to go unpunished. The influence exerted upon his descendants by his life and teaching led to the state of corruption that demanded the destruction of the whole world by a flood. . . . The longer men lived, the more corrupt they became. So with the apostasy at Sinai. Unless punishment had been speedily visited upon transgression, the same results would again have been seen.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 325.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the question at the end of Monday’s study. What are ways that we can worship the creation itself, as opposed to the Creator? For example, how can we seek to be good stewards of the earth and seek to protect the environment without worshiping it or making it into an idol itself?
- ❷ One may discern the gravity of the situation by the consequences and results of an action or by the seriousness of the reaction to the event. Why did Moses order the execution of those who stubbornly refused to repent and continued in their rebellion against God and His teaching?
- ❸ Why is substitutionary atonement the only correct model of atonement? Why is any theory of atonement that denies, or downplays, the substitutionary foundation of the gospel a grievous theological error? Read 1 Peter 2:24. How does it powerfully reveal the idea of Jesus as our Substitute?

Wrapped in God's Love

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Sixteen-year-old Domenico didn't want to lose Fulvia after meeting her at a dance in Florence, Italy. So, he lied when she asked about his parents.

"What do your parents do?" she asked.

"My parents are rich," he replied. "They own a beautiful car."

Then Fulvia asked where he lived. Without thinking, he gave her the address of the orphanage where he lived.

But when she went to the address and found the orphanage, Domenico couldn't lie anymore. "I'm an orphan," he said. "I live there."

Fulvia told her father everything, and Domenico thought their relationship was over. But her father's response surprised Domenico.

"We have three children," he said. "Invite him over. We'll have four."

Fulvia's family accepted Domenico like a son, and he visited their home regularly. Wrapped in their love, Domenico experienced God's love for the first time. He had heard about God, but now he saw His love in real life. A desire grew in his heart to know God, and he began to pray.

Years passed. Domenico left the orphanage and married Fulvia when he was 22. He still wanted to know God. He had watched the 1956 U.S. movie *The Ten Commandments* in the orphanage, and he wondered if there was a church that kept all Ten Commandments. He wondered if anyone lived a Christian life as described by the Bible.

One day, when he was 30, Domenico switched on the radio and heard a voice say, "Now we're going to talk about the apostle Paul." Domenico listened and noticed the radio show hosts spoke differently from any other Christian he had heard. He began to listen to the radio station regularly. When a speaker mentioned Ellen G. White's *Steps to Christ*, he called to ask for a copy. He also asked if the book could be delivered to his house by someone who could answer questions about what he had heard on the radio.

Emmanuel and his wife showed up at Domenico's house with the book. Emmanuel opened the Bible to answer Domenico's questions and, at his request, shared the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Wishing to know about the history of Christianity, Domenico then read *The Great Controversy*.

After seven months of Bible studies, Domenico felt wrapped in God's love, and he was baptized. "I'm grateful to Adventist radio because it changed my life," said Domenico Civardi, now 68.



Thank you for your mission offerings that help proclaim the gospel through radio broadcasts around the world.

“Please, Show Me Your Glory”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 33:7–34:35; Deut. 18:15, 18; John 17:3; Rom. 2:4; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 3:18.*

Memory Text: “And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation’ ” (*Exod. 34:6, 7, NKJV*).

We all need to grow in our walk with God. Without growth, we are dead. The apostle Peter declares: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (*2 Pet. 3:18, NIV*). We need to be willing to grow. We are daily in God’s university, where there is no graduation but a constant learning process. In each stage of growth, you can be perfect if you allow God to mold you into the person that He calls you, in Christ, to be.

Think of a school. If first-graders learn how to read and count to 100, they receive a passing grade because their knowledge is perfect at that stage and scale of growth. However, if this same level of knowledge, and no more, was detected in a high schooler, it would indicate a colossal failure in his or her education. It is similar with our growth in the grace and knowledge of God. In each stage of our development, we can be as perfect in our sphere as Christ was in His.

This week we study how Moses, through knowing and following God’s instructions, was growing in his walk with the Lord.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 20.

The Tent of Meeting

Read Exodus 33:7–11. Why did God ask Moses to build the tent of meeting?

We must not confuse “the tent of meeting” (built outside of Israel’s camp) with the tabernacle, which was later constructed and located in the center of the camp. We do not know how often Moses consulted with God in the tent of meeting. However, one thing we know for sure: Moses’ encounters with God resulted in a close friendship between them. “The LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (*Exod. 33:11, NKJV*). A friend is a person we can consult and openly discuss most everything with and trust that he or she will never reveal it to others. A friend is one of the nicest things to have and one of the nicest persons to be.

As recorded in Exodus 19–34, the story of Moses is very instructive of how God transforms our lives. How did God build a relationship with this outstanding leader? A study of the life of Moses shows how he grew in his knowledge, not only of God’s power but of His love and character. This is a crucial component of having a relationship with God.

Prior to arriving at Mount Sinai, Moses was mightily used by God even while being prepared for a special leadership role. In the land of Midian, while taking care of sheep, God inspired him to write two books: Job and Genesis. Then, in the dramatic event of the burning bush, he was called by God to lead Israel out of Egypt. He saw the defeat of the Egyptian gods and the mighty Egyptian army in the Red Sea. He observed for many weeks how God led Israel from Egypt to Sinai. After the experience resulted in his shining face, he led Israel for another 39 years, to the brink of the Promised Land. The biblical message states that Moses was a faithful servant of God (*Deut. 34:5, Josh. 1:1*), an unimpaired light in the darkness, a model prophet by whom others would be measured (*Deut. 18:15, 18*). He was an agent of change, even though the people did not always follow his directions and words. When they did, they prospered.

We may learn from Moses because his exceptional life story tells us what God can do when we let Him change us. What were some turning points in your walk with God, where you recognized how He worked powerfully in your life?

That I May Know You

Read Exodus 33:12–17. What did Moses ask the Lord to teach him? Why did he demand God’s presence to guide them?

Moses’ growth in the Lord was steady. He drew closer and closer to the Lord and sought to model himself after God’s image. One day when he was conversing with God in the tent of meeting, Moses suddenly realized that he did not know Him, and he uttered a specific prayer: “ ‘Show me now Your way, that I may know You’ ” (*Exod. 33:13, NKJV*). Moses was aware of his deep need to understand God on a new level. He discovered that the more he knew the Lord, the more he did not know Him. He recognized his need and wholeheartedly desired to know Him better. God willingly granted Moses’ wish.

By looking at the experiences of Moses so far, we can observe how Moses was drawn into a deeper, intimate relationship with the Lord and how he grew spiritually.

First, Moses climbed the mountain and “went up to God” (*Exod. 19:3, NKJV*). Then he went “to the top of the mountain” (*Exod. 19:20, NKJV*) and afterward approached the cloud, “the thick darkness” in which God resided (*Exod. 20:21, NKJV*).

On another occasion, “Moses entered the cloud” where God was, and he stayed with the Lord 40 days and 40 nights (*Exod. 24:18, NIV*). During these 40 days, God gave Moses two precious gifts: (1) the gift of the Decalogue written by God Himself on the two tablets, also chiseled by Him (*Exod. 24:12*), and (2) the instructions on how to build and furnish the tabernacle (*see Exodus 25–31*).

Then he spent another 40 days and nights with the Lord, interceding for sinners (*Exod. 32:30–32, Deut. 9:18*).

Yet, even after all this, Moses desired to know God’s character more concretely, and God soon gave him special insights to understand who He is. This knowledge Moses desired was not a mere intellectual understanding of God but an experiential knowledge of His person.

No wonder centuries later Jesus would say: “ ‘And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’ ” (*John 17:3, NKJV*). What better way for God to make Himself known to humans than by becoming a human Himself?

Do you know God, or do you just know *about* Him? What is the crucial difference between the two?

“Please, Show Me Your Glory”

After the golden calf apostasy, Moses interceded for God’s people and wanted to be assured that the Lord would continue leading them to the Promised Land. Deep down within his being, he also wanted to know the Lord better.

Read Exodus 33:18–23. How did God answer Moses’ request to see His glory?

“Please, show me your glory,” Moses asked the Lord. In His mercy, the Lord did reveal His glory to him. However, when answering Moses’ request, God promised to show him His “goodness.” One can safely conclude that God’s glory is His goodness, that is, His character (see also Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 576; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 414, 415; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 313).

“It is the glory of God to give His virtue to His children. He desires to see men and women reaching the highest standard.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 530. His glory is to embrace repentant sinners (see *Prophets and Kings*, p. 668) and supply everything needed to change them. At the same time, it is our “glory” to reveal His character in our own lives and to make it known to others.

This reflection of God’s character, His goodness, kindness, and tender love, must be seen in our actions. This way, we have a chance to be not only a blessing to the world but a shining light to the onlooking universe. As Paul states: “For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings” (*1 Cor. 4:9, NIV*). This cosmic dimension gives to our lives and service a meaning and purpose that we can barely begin to imagine.

In Romans 2:4, Paul says that “the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (*NKJV*). That is, it is God’s goodness and character pointed out by the Holy Spirit that convinces people of their sinfulness and need of salvation. Indeed, when we look at the cross and know who was there (the Lord Himself) and why He was there—because He loved us and this was the only way to save us—we have the greatest revelation possible of His goodness and character.

How much time do you spend focusing on the Cross and what it tells you about the character of God?

The Self-Revelation of God

Read Exodus 34:1–28. How did God reveal His glory to Moses?

Moses had to take with him two stone tablets like the first ones, which he had broken (*Exod. 32:19*). He was going to meet with the Lord on Mount Sinai for the seventh time. His previous climbs are mentioned in the following texts: (1) *Exod. 19:3, 7*; (2) *Exod. 19:8, 14*; (3) *Exod. 19:20, 25*; (4) *Exod. 20:21, Exod. 24:3*; (5) *Exod. 24:9, 12–18; Exod. 32:15*; (6) *Exod. 32:30, 31*. Moses started his climb early in the morning.

Moses was now prepared for this glorious insight into God's character. The beauty of God's character is best explained in this stunning self-revelation of Himself. It is the most important description of who God is; it is the golden thread woven throughout the Bible (*Num. 14:18, Neh. 9:17, Ps. 103:8, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2*). The Lord's proclamation here is the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. In crucial places, biblical authors apply, repeat, or expand on this self-proclamation of the living God because God's character must be correctly understood.

When Moses received the exceptional, unprecedented, and unparalleled explanation of God's name, he bowed down and worshiped the Lord. When we get glimpses of God's love, grace, mercy, compassion, goodness, faithfulness, forgiveness, holiness, and justice, we also are attracted to Him. It is when we see and admire His exceptional qualities that we start to love Him, a love that leads to the desire to serve and obey Him. Because He loves us, we love Him back (*1 John 4:19*).

In this self-revelation, God assures Moses that He will perform marvelous deeds for His people and lead them into the Promised Land. He renews the covenant with them, promising that other nations will see His majesty and awesome work. " 'Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you' " (*Exod. 34:10, NKJV*).

However, the Israelites needed to obey God and follow ten clear stipulations in order to secure their prosperity. Then Moses was asked by God to write the content of that covenant, which had already been broken (*Exod. 34:27, 28*).

The Shining Face of Moses

Read Exodus 34:29–35. What was the cause of Moses' radiant face?

After God revealed His character of love to Moses, Moses descended to Israel's camp with a radiant face. Did Moses know at first that his face was radiant? Not at all. The closer one is to the Lord, the more keenly aware the person is of his or her imperfections compared to God's holiness.

What was the cause for Moses' transformation that resulted in his face becoming radiant? The reason was not in the simple fact that he was in God's presence, because several times previously he had been with the Lord and his face did not become radiant after those encounters. However, if he had never been in the Lord's presence, his face would never have shone. It was only when he understood God's goodness and kindness, and he completely opened himself to God because of the beauty of His character, that Moses was transformed, and his face shone. Our hearts and minds can experience a change when we surrender to God and allow Him to be the Lord and King of our lives.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. How can Jesus gradually transform you into His image?

Paul compares Moses' shining face with Jesus Christ and that the glory of Jesus (in whom God's law and grace were personified) surpasses the glory of the law with Moses. Christ, together with His law, can be engraved in our characters only when we fix our eyes on Jesus (*Heb. 3:1, Heb. 12:2*) and only by the power of the Spirit of God (*2 Cor. 3:12–18*).

Moses is a model for us, demonstrating what God can do for us when we allow Him to change our characters and to mold us into His divine image. This is what Paul means when he talks about walking in the "newness of life" (*Rom. 6:4*).

What areas of your character need to reflect the character of God better? Probably every area, right? However, how can focusing on the Cross, and what it means, give you encouragement and assurance of salvation?

Further Thought: Carefully read Ellen G. White, “Idolatry at Sinai,” pp. 327–330, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

On a gloomy day, a father and son visited a cathedral. As they looked at the stained-glass windows with beautiful depictions of different biblical scenarios, the sun suddenly began shining through the glass picture of people, brightly illuminating them with impressive light. The small boy asked his father: “Daddy, who are these people?” The father didn’t know much about Christianity, Christ, or His disciples but quickly replied: “These people are Christians.” This dazzling picture stayed in the mind of the son. One day the boy’s teacher asked in class: “Children, do you know who Christians are?” The small boy remembered the bright picture in the cathedral and answered: “I know; Christians are shining people.” Along the same line, Jesus said to His followers, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (*Matt. 5:16, NKJV*). Only shining people can be agents of change.

Discussion Questions:

- ① “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 189. What powerful message is here for all of us about how our characters, our actions, and our attitudes impact our witness?
- ② Exodus 34:6, 7 is rightly called the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. Why?
- ③ How can you explain the beauty of God’s character, based on the self-revelation of God in Exodus 34:6, 7, to people who ask who your God is?
- ④ In class, let people discuss how the character and actions of people professing Christ impact their walk. That is, what has been the influence of those who were kind, gracious, humble, and forgiving on your own experience? At the same time, how have unkind, unforgiving, and arrogant “Christians” impacted your walk with the Lord?

Baatka's Forever Best Friend

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Baatka felt so lonely in Mongolia. He often stood at the window of his home, looking outside for a real friend who would be with him forever.

The shy and timid 14-year-old boy was the only son in his family. Father was always at work. Mother had mental health issues, and she spent a month in the hospital every year. Baatka felt so alone. He contemplated death.

Then a cousin, Doogii, invited him to go to a Seventh-day Adventist church in Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar. "Come to church," she said. "Something interesting will happen there."

Baatka went because he was lonely. He didn't hear a word of the sermon. The microphone wasn't working because of electricity problems, and he had a hearing impairment that made it difficult to hear the preacher. But he liked the church members. They smiled and accepted him. They treated him like a friend. He also liked the singing. The church gave him goosebumps, and he returned the next Sabbath to feel the goosebumps again.

Church members spoke about God as their best friend.

"God can be your forever friend," one told the boy.

"You'll never be alone," said another.

Baatka wondered if God was real. *I can't see Him. Can He be my friend?* he thought.

After that, he went to the church every Sabbath. The church became the only positive place in his life, and the church members became his family. Life gained meaning, and Baatka found a desire to live.

Little by little, Baatka began to believe that God was real. His ears didn't hear God speak, but his heart heard God's voice. God became his forever best friend, transforming his mind and changing his life.

Today, Baatka Orgil is 31 and a new person in God. The once quiet and timid boy is now a Global Mission pioneer, planting churches in unentered areas of Mongolia. "I love to share how my life has changed," he said. "I want to help people like me. That's why I am serving as a missionary."

Baatka, who is married and has two children, said he once thought that God chose only talented people as missionaries. "But now I understand that He chooses only the right people."

"Even though I didn't believe in myself, God believed in me," he said. "If God could believe in me, I want to believe in Him, too."



Thank you for your prayers for Global Mission pioneers who, like Baatka, face huge challenges planting churches among unreached people groups around the world. Learn more about Global Mission pioneers on the Adventist Mission website: bit.ly/GMPioneers.

The Tabernacle



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 35:1–36:7, Gen. 1:1, Exod. 36:8–39:31, Heb. 7:25, Exod. 40:1–38, John 1:14.*

Memory Text: “Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. . . . For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (*Exod. 40:34, 38, NKJV*).

The principal task of God's people in the Old Testament (as well as for us today) was to live in close relationship with the Lord; to worship and serve Him; and, also, to present the right picture of God to others (*Deut. 4:5–8*).

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve hid from God because their sin made them afraid of Him. Sinfulness makes humans naturally afraid of God, and this fear twists our view of His character. The good news is that God takes the first step to span this rift and, on His initiative, He repairs the gap and the broken relationship. He calls the sinner back to Himself: “ ‘Where are you?’ ” (*Gen. 3:9, NKJV*).

Thus, our primary mission is to present the correct character of God and His loving and righteous acts to those around us. When people are attracted to God and are convinced of His unselfish love toward them, they will give their lives to Him and obey what He tells them to do, knowing that it is for their own good.

The sanctuary demonstrated God's closeness to humanity and revealed the greatest truths to them, which is how He saves those who come to Him in faith.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.

The Sabbath of the Lord

However much those opposed to the seventh-day Sabbath argue, falsely, that it was for the Jews only (the seventh day was set apart and sanctified in Eden [see *Gen. 2:1–3*]); or they argue, falsely, that the Jews first heard about it at Sinai (the Jews were keeping the Sabbath before Sinai [see *Exod. 16:22–29*])—there is no question that the Sabbath was very much a part of the life of the Hebrew people from the start.

Read Exodus 35:1–3. What truth was reiterated to the people here in the context of the building of the sanctuary?

The Sabbath and its message was, is, and always will be about God—who He is and what His mighty works are. The Sabbath reminds us of His creative and salvific acts and focuses our attention on God, who wants to dwell with His people. In this way, the Sabbath and the sanctuary point in the same direction: God's presence in our lives.

The Sabbath of the Old Testament church conveys a manifold message. One may summarize its essence in five crucial points:

1. *God is the Creator*, and the Bible opens with this stunning and cornerstone proclamation (*Gen. 1:1*). The vivid memorial of God's creation is the Sabbath (*Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:8–11*). From this truth—God as our Creator—all other biblical truths flow.
2. *The Messiah will come*, and this hope centers on God's promise of the Seed, who would overcome the serpent (Satan) and bring victory over evil.
3. *God will establish His kingdom, and the Sabbath is its foretaste*.
4. *Salvation comes from the Lord*, and God's people testify that God is their Savior and Redeemer and that salvation comes as a result of His grace and His grace alone.
5. *God is the ultimate Judge of all people. Those who persistently defy and deny Him will have no future, but He freely gives eternal life to those who follow Him.*

The Jews have a saying: *More than Israel kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept Israel.* Though we as Adventists probably wouldn't express it like that, what important role does the Sabbath have in the life of our church family?

Offerings and the Spirit

Read Exodus 35:4–36:7. What important lessons are here for us today?

An abundance of various precious materials was needed to build the tabernacle, and it was accomplished by generous donations from God's people, who gave from the bottom of their hearts, willingly and with joy. They gave gold, silver, bronze, fine linen, precious stones, unique fabrics, acacia wood, olive oil, spices, and many other needed items. People also donated their labor because many specific objects needed to be crafted through their artistic and diligent work on the tent or its furniture. Also, tailors had to weave garments for the priests, who would be ministering in the tabernacle, and for the high priest, whose very elaborate garments included a breastplate and turban.

God had abundantly blessed the Israelites through the gifts that the Egyptians had given them on their departure from Egypt. Now it was their opportunity to give offerings of gratitude for God's merciful and mighty leadership, and their hearts were moved to accomplish this work to His glory.

The people were giving with such joy and abundance that Moses was told: " 'The people are bringing more than enough' " (*Exod. 36:5, NIV*). So, Moses had to stop their donations "because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work" on the tabernacle (*Exod. 36:7, NIV*).

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God equipped and empowered the people to accurately build the tabernacle. Bezalel, Aholiab, and others were "filled . . . with the Spirit of God" (*Exod. 35:31, NKJV*), which means that they were endowed with skills, wisdom, and artistic knowledge to perfectly do all the work. It was an enormous project and had to be created exactly according to the model God showed Moses.

It is significant that the gift of the Holy Spirit was related to people's different abilities and skills, which needed to be employed in building the tabernacle. To be filled with the Spirit is not a magical process and does not mean that special spiritual forces are within humans. To advance God's cause and fulfill His mission, God empowers His followers to accomplish His objectives and to do it well.

What spiritual gifts have you received when you were filled with the Holy Spirit? Remember that the spiritual gifts can flourish only when you cultivate the fruits of the Spirit in your life (*Gal. 5:22, 23*).

The Tabernacle Built

Skim through Exodus 36:8–39:31. Why do you think such explicit instructions were given? What does this teach us about how God cares about every detail?

Moses carefully constructed the tabernacle, and the instructions he had received on Mount Sinai were diligently implemented. The biblical text enumerates the following: (1) the tabernacle with its different fabrics, curtains, and parts (*Exod. 36:8–38*); (2) the ark (*Exod. 37:1–9*); (3) the table for the showbread (*Exod. 37:10–16*); (4) the lampstand (*Exod. 37:17–24*); (5) the altar of incense (*Exod. 37:25–29*); (6) the altar of burnt offering (*Exod. 38:1–7*); (7) the basin for washing (*Exod. 38:8*); (8) the courtyard (*Exod. 38:9–20*); and (9) the material used for the tabernacle (*Exod. 38:21–31*). Exodus 39 continues with the descriptions of the ephod, breastplate, and other priestly garment pieces.

The tabernacle's services were visual object lessons of the gospel, demonstrating God's entire plan of redemption. The various ceremonies depicted (1) how God abhors and deals with sin, (2) how He saves repentant people, (3) what is the fate of the wicked, and (4) how He will secure a glorious future that will be without evil.

Two different but closely related services were performed in the sanctuary during the year: the daily and the yearly. This two-phase ministry illustrated how God treats sin and saves sinners. Through the *daily* sanctuary services, God assured those who repented that He forgave their sins and graciously offered them salvation. To receive this gift of salvation, a sacrifice had to be made, and these sacrifices pointed to the death of the Messiah, whose blood "cleanses us from all sin" (*1 John 1:7, NKJV*). Confession of sin and accepting the robe of Christ's righteousness was at the center of this gift (*Ps. 32:1, 2*). In this way, the repentant sinner was assured forgiveness and could rejoice in salvation.

The *yearly* service, performed on the Day of the Atonement, demonstrated how God eradicates sin, solves the sin problem, and secures the sinless future (*Leviticus 16, John 1:29*). Presently, Christ's twofold ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is another expression of God's work for us (*Heb. 7:25*) and will bring the final solution to the problem of evil (*Dan. 7:13, 14, 22, 27; Dan. 8:14; Rev. 21:4*).

The sanctuary was a place for worshiping God, praising Him, and giving thanks. Worship is about maintaining one's relationship with God, who invites believers into that fellowship.

God's Presence in the Tabernacle

Read Exodus 40:1–38. How did the Israelites discern God's presence?

The final chapter of Exodus (*Exodus 40*) describes the dedication of the tabernacle and the gift of the Decalogue. The tabernacle's dedication was the culminating event of Israel at Sinai.

God's glory is His holiness, His character, and His loving presence, which is goodness itself (*Exod. 3:5; Exod. 33:18, 19*). His presence filled the tabernacle and was visible as the cloud, the Shekinah glory. The book of Exodus ends with the emphasis on God's guiding presence, in the cloud of the Lord by day, and in the cloud of fire by night. In a very real and powerful way, the Hebrew people were to experience not just the reality of God but also His close and abiding presence as He led them.

Moses set up the tabernacle on the first day of the first month in the second year (*Exod. 40:2, 17*). He also consecrated everything—including Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (*Exod. 40:9, 13–15*)—with anointing oil. He went through the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place, and the courtyard, dedicating it all to the Lord. Through this process, he inaugurated the services for the whole sanctuary (*also see Num. 7:1*). Only during the inauguration of the tabernacle was Moses able to enter the Most Holy Place; thereafter, the high priest alone could minister there each year on the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 16:2, 17*).

On three occasions, the biblical text states that the work was finished: (1) at the end of Creation week, God underlines the completion of His creative works (*Gen. 2:1–3*); (2) on the completion of the tabernacle, the biblical text declares: “So Moses finished the work” (*Exod. 40:33*); and (3) it also is expressed when Solomon finished the work on the temple (*1 Kings 7:51*).

This connection between the Creation and Israel's sanctuary points to the cosmic dimension, the time when the Lord will dwell with the redeemed on the new earth in the New Jerusalem, which is “the Tabernacle of God” (*Rev. 21:2, 3; compare with Rev. 22:1–4*).

God's filling the tabernacle with His presence (*Exod. 40:34*) was the grand climax to events that began with the birth of Moses and continued with the defeat of the Egyptian gods during the 10 plagues, with the escape from Egypt, with the defeat of the Egyptian army, and, finally, with God's revelation on Mount Sinai.

What are ways that, even now, you can experience the presence of God? Why is it important that you do so?

Jesus Tabernacled With Humanity

Read John 1:14. How is Christ's incarnation compared to the tabernacle?

The incarnation of Jesus is a mystery as well as an exclusive science that the redeemed will study throughout eternity. The apostle John states that Christ, by taking upon Himself our body, revealed that He dwells with us in a tangible way. Jesus here in the flesh resembles the God of the Old Testament, who dwelt with the Israelites in the tabernacle at Sinai and in the wilderness as they journeyed to the Promised Land.

During His incarnation, Jesus tabernacled with humanity. What an unfathomable concession! The eternal God comes down to us, as one of us, in order to assure us that He truly is "Immanuel, God with us."

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said that if two or three are gathered in His name, He will be there among them. Christ is with His people through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Christ invites His followers to be in close relationship with Him: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20, *ESV*).

Read Revelation 21:1–3. What is presented to us here?

The New Jerusalem will come down from heaven to the earth, and John declares: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:3, *NKJV*). There is no temple in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22) because the whole city is the temple, God's sanctuary. The city's length, breadth, and height are equal (Rev. 21:16) as it was with the Most Holy Place in the sanctuary, which was in the shape of a cube, with all sides equal. For eternity, in a world without sin, death, or suffering, we will dwell in the immediate presence of our God.

Looking at what we have been promised in Jesus, how can we learn to endure to the end?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 353–358, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The construction of the sanctuary was preceded by a divine act of redemption, namely, the deliverance of Israel from the enslaving power of Egypt. This, in turn, was followed by God’s willingness to enter into a permanent covenant relationship with His people. He would be their God, and they would become His people (Ex. 6:7). The way they would relate to Him and to each other was defined by the covenant law. The tabernacle was indeed a place of meeting, a place where God and humans came together. It was only after redemption and the establishment of permanent union with God through the covenant that the people had access to God in His dwelling place.”—*Andrews Bible Commentary: Old Testament, “Exodus”* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), p. 226.

Meanwhile, Ellen G. White describes the purpose of the sanctuary services: “Thus in the ministration of the tabernacle, and of the temple that afterward took its place, the people were taught each day the great truths relative to Christ’s death and ministration, and once each year their minds were carried forward to the closing events of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the final purification of the universe from sin and sinners.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 358.

Discussion Question:

- ❶ Central to the worship services in the sanctuary was the shedding of blood. All sorts of animals were sacrificed, and their blood was used in almost all the temple rituals. What did the blood symbolize, and what did all these sacrifices ultimately point to?
- ❷ However amazing it is that God, the Creator of the universe, would in the sanctuary dwell among His people, how much more astonishing is it that He would come to dwell among us as one of us, a human being? That itself would have been an amazing expression of love. But then to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin—that is, to die in our behalf? What does this teach us about the character of God? Also, what does this teach us about how much God wants to see us saved into His eternal kingdom?
- ❸ Read Hebrews 8:1–6. What does it tell us about how the earthly sanctuary reflected what Jesus is doing for us now in the heavenly sanctuary?

Great Reward of the Sabbath

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Fernando Joaquim Ge joined a big construction company in Mozambique with the understanding that he wouldn't work on Sabbath. But after three years, the company boss asked him to go on a business trip on Saturday. Fernando reminded his boss, Alexander, that he didn't work on Saturdays.

Still, at 5 a.m. Saturday, Alexander pulled up at Fernando's house to drive to Zimbabwe. When Fernando declined to go, Alexander barred him from returning to work until they had a one-on-one meeting.

At the meeting several days later, Alexander suspended Fernando for seven days without pay. He also gave him three options: resign, work on Saturdays, or forfeit two days' pay for every Saturday that he missed work. He told Fernando to submit his decision in writing after seven days.

Fernando turned in a 10-page document with his decision. He wrote that he couldn't resign because he needed the job. He wrote that he couldn't work on Saturdays because he obeyed God, and he included a number of Bible verses about the Sabbath. He concluded that he was willing to take a pay cut for every Saturday that he missed work, and he also was ready to make up Saturday work on Sundays. Taking the document, Alexander told Fernando to keep working while he discussed it with his management team.

A week passed, and Alexander called Fernando on a Sunday to come to his house. The house was in another town, and Fernando arrived by public bus. Alexander instructed Fernando to drive a company car to a town 70 miles away to inspect a company project. Fernando returned late that night, after the public buses had stopped running, and he slept at Alexander's house. The next Sunday, Alexander asked Fernando to come over again. This time, he wanted him to take his mother out in the company car.

The following day, on Monday, Alexander called a company meeting and asked Fernando to stand up. "Fernando took a pay cut because of his faith in God," he said. "But now we see that he is sincere, so he doesn't need to work on Saturdays." Then he presented Fernando with keys to a company car. "Use this car for all company business," he said. "And if you have business for your church, you also can use it freely, and we will pay for the gas. We only have one request. Ask your pastor to pray for our company to prosper."

From that day in 2003 until today, Fernando has never had any Sabbath problems at work. The company car has proven to be a blessing to the church, and Fernando has used it to visit sick and elderly people, to participate in evangelistic programs, and to engage in other church activities. Every time people see the car, they remember that Fernando keeps the Sabbath. "It is worthwhile to be faithful to God," Fernando said. "There is a great reward."

Pray for the gospel to be proclaimed in Mozambique and other countries in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, the recipient of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this week.

The book of Joshua marks the transition from the leadership of Moses to Joshua. Our study this quarter, *Lessons of Faith From Joshua* by Barna Magyarosi, begins with the story of the Israelites entering into the Promised Land and ends with them being settled there.

Although Joshua had a tough act to follow by picking up where Moses had left off, he would do what Moses never did: take the nation into Canaan.

Joshua does not do this task alone but with the power and guidance of the Lord, who would have brought the people into the land a generation earlier had they obeyed their end of the covenant.

As the book begins, the promises of God given to the patriarchs and to Moses are about to be fulfilled. There is an air of expectation and excitement, a new beginning for the people.

Our study aims to show us that, although the book of Joshua was written more than three millennia ago, the world in which we live today is not so different from that of Joshua's in its spiritual challenges. The example of Joshua will certainly inspire us to claim God's promises concerning our times and to succeed through His power, just as Joshua did.

Lesson 1—Recipe for Success

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **A New Moses** (*Josh. 1:1–9*)

MONDAY: **Cross! Take! Divide! Serve!** (*Josh. 1:1–18*)

TUESDAY: **Heirs of Promises** (*Josh. 1:4–6*)

WEDNESDAY: **Be Strong!** (*Josh. 1:7–9*)

THURSDAY: **Prosperous and Successful** (*Josh. 1:8*)

Memory Text—*Joshua 1:7, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The book of Joshua is about new possibilities. Just as God opened up a new chapter in Israel's life, He can in ours as well.

Lesson 2—Surprised by Grace

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Second Chance** (*Josh. 2:1*)

MONDAY: **Value in Unexpected Places** (*Josh. 2:2–11*)

TUESDAY: **New Allegiance** (*Josh. 2:12–16*)

WEDNESDAY: **Conflicting Values** (*Josh. 9:1–20*)

THURSDAY: **Surprising Grace** (*Josh. 9:21–27*)

Memory Text—*Hebrews 11:31, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The most fascinating stories of the book of Joshua have relevance for our faith today and show that God's grace has infinite possibilities to surprise.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on MP3 disc, and via online download to people who are legally blind and individuals who cannot hold or focus on ink print. Contact Christian Record Services, Inc., PO Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: services@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.