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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 backsliding. 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

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

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.

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*).

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.

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, Shiphrah 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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 2:23–25*

Study Focus: *Exod. 1:1–2:25*

Introduction: This first lesson summarizes the long history of God’s people in Egypt, spanning from the time of Joseph, when Israel experienced enormous prosperity, to their enslavement under the cruel Pharaoh, who ordered the execution of all male babies. However, God is not passive when forces of evil try to destroy His people. He is their Savior. So, He sent a deliverer, His servant Moses, whose miraculous protection at birth led to his extraordinary inclusion in Pharaoh’s family as an adopted son. The first 40 years of Moses’ life are marked by receiving the best education, first from his mother and then at the Egyptian university. Even though he was trained to sit on the throne of Egypt and become a great leader, Moses found himself, through his mistakes and God’s providence, in Jethro’s household. There he married and became a shepherd.

Lesson Themes

1. God’s fulfillment of His promises and blessings of prosperity are to be celebrated. Thankful hearts recognize God’s love and care in their lives and acknowledge that it is God who blesses and intervenes to give prosperity and success. However, if not careful, we can all too easily lose sight of the fact that God, not our achievements, is responsible for our prosperity. Forgetting that all we have ultimately belongs to God may lead some to be overcome with jealousy, desiring to control and destroy the good work that God is seeking to do through them to save others.
2. Prayers have different functions. They not only serve to praise the Lord for His goodness and kindness toward us, but they are petitions—cries of wounded, oppressed, desperate, and abused people who need help. Evil people may violate the rights of others, but God promises to assist those who are thus harmed.
3. The good news is that God hears our desperate calls for His forgiveness, presence, and intervention. He sees our struggles, notes our tears, understands our agony, and responds to our groanings.
4. All oppressed, persecuted, exploited, and marginalized people can identify with the stories in the book of Exodus. Through these historical accounts, they learn that they are not alone. God is with them in spite of His perceived silence. His invisible presence and Bible promises seek to provide inner comfort and the assurance of salvation.
5. God remembers His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is faithful. What He promises He delivers. God intervenes in His own time. Divine timing is often contrary to our finite desires and expectations.

Part II: Commentary

The book of Exodus is not about Moses but, primarily, about God and His leadership in the life of Moses and Israel. Exodus begins with the picture of God's blessings upon Jacob's family: they were only 70 individuals when they followed Joseph to Egypt, but they became exceedingly numerous (*Exod. 1:7, NIV*), in accordance with God's promise to Abraham (*Gen. 15:5*).

However, Israel's prosperity turns into a problem. The new Egyptian Pharaoh becomes jealous and afraid of Israel; so, he shrewdly enslaves them through hard work and oppression. Historically, these dramatic events can best be placed against the backdrop of Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty. The new Hyksos dynasty began to rule at that time. Its first king, Ahmose (1580–1546 B.C.), can be recognized as the one who did not acknowledge Joseph's achievements (*Exod. 1:8*) and began to enslave the Israelites. The situation of God's people quickly began to decline, from one of prosperity and the free inhabitation of Egypt to abject slavery under the bondage of harsh masters (*Exod. 1:11, 13, 14*). The king behind this drastic change was Amenhotep I (1553–1532). However, the more the Israelites were oppressed, the more they increased in number (*Exod. 1:12*). The pressure upon Pharaoh grew to subdue God's people through hard labor.

This chain of pharaonic ruthlessness and oppression culminated during the cruel reign of Thutmose I (1532–1514), who mercilessly issued the death decree to kill all male Hebrew babies (*Exod. 1:22*). If the Exodus occurred in March 1450 B.C., the date we advocate, then Moses was born 80 years earlier, which would be 1530 B.C., during the rulership of Thutmose I. Thutmose I had a daughter who became Queen Hatshepsut (1504–1482). Hatshepsut adopted Moses and gave him that name. Hatshepsut died while Moses was in Midian. Hatshepsut's husband Thutmose II (1508–1504) had, by a concubine, a son, namely Thutmose III (1504–1450), who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Pharaoh Amenhotep II (1453–1425), not the firstborn son of Thutmose III, was for more than two years a co-regent with his father and had a son who died in the tenth plague as the firstborn son. Pharaoh Thutmose IV (1425–1412), who succeeded Amenhotep II on the throne, was not the eldest son, as the inscription on the Sphinx Stela indicates. Thus, the biblical data can be harmonized with extrabiblical evidence.

Moses' Egyptian name fits well with this time period (similar to the name Thutmose) and means "born of" or "drawn (from)." His full name probably was Hapi-mose (Hapi being the god of the river Nile). But Moses, when referring to himself and writing under God's inspiration, cut

Hapi from his name, a sign of his refusal to be associated with the god of the Nile.

Moses' birth (*Exod. 2:1–10*) is a turning point in the flow of Israel's history. God's people were praying for deliverance from slavery, asking for His help in their desperate situation. God answered their supplications with the birth of Moses. God's miraculous intervention to protect Moses' life in this particular circumstance was possible only in collaboration with his parents and Miriam, his sister. Thus, we observe that God uses human instruments to advance His cause and purpose.

In the darkness of hardships and our own suffering, we need to fix our eyes on God and trust Him, His leadership, and His wisdom because He will never forsake His children. He is with them in the midst of oppression and persecution. He knows the tears of the abused and wounded. He suffers with them. The prophet Isaiah aptly declares that God is afflicted in all our afflictions (*Isa. 63:9*). His solidarity with us is strong and irrevocable. In our suffering, He suffers; in our distress, He feels distressed; and in our pain, He feels pain. He is on the side of the persecuted who suffer for righteousness' sake (*Matt. 5:10*). He is a merciful and gracious Lord. He is longsuffering with us, and, on the cross, He suffered to secure our salvation. In contrast, oppressors, abusers, and violators will experience God's judgment of condemnation and final destruction. In this context, let us remind ourselves of the insightful statement of Ellen G. White: "In the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 474.

Shiphrah and Puah, two midwives, are models of faithfulness. Because they feared God, they did not need to be afraid of Pharaoh's anger. Their respect for the God of life guided them to have respect for human life. They refused to kill, by "accident," the male Hebrew babies at birth. They knew that life is a gift from God, so they rejected Pharaoh's orders.

The Bible does not reveal to us much about the first 40 years of Moses' life (*Acts 7:23*), save these salient details: (1) Moses became the son of Pharaoh's daughter; (2) when grown, he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew; (3) he disputed with a Hebrew man hitting a fellow Hebrew; (4) subsequently, he fled to Midian where he stayed with Jethro, a priest, and married Jethro's daughter, Zipporah; and (5) then he had a son, Gershon.

The principal point of the lesson for this week is the phrase "and God remembered his covenant" from our key text: "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (*Exod. 2:24*). God's faithfulness to His covenant promises

brings stability into relationships between God and His people. He keeps His part, in spite of our unfaithfulness. God's covenant constitutes the legal establishment of a relationship between God and His followers.

Nevertheless, His covenantal promise was seemingly unfulfilled, as His people were not prosperous but suffering. The statement that God "remembered his covenant" does not mean God had a lapse of memory or that He forgot His people. In His own time, God intervenes in favor of His people. God committed Himself by His word to Abraham that he would be a great nation; so, in fulfillment of this promise, God steps in to bring freedom to the oppressed. God delivers Israel because He promised to bless Abraham's posterity.

In these two concluding verses, the term *Elohim* for God appears four times. *Elohim* is a mighty, strong God and is described in connection to four actions: God "heard," "remembered," "looked on," and "was concerned." These verses underline God's knowledge of the situation, His care, and His willingness to act in favor of His people. He will change the flow of history because His time for intervention has arrived. God in His mercy will say no to the oppression and give freedom to His followers so that they may serve their God out of gratitude for the gift of freedom. Thus, God's grace triumphs over violence, oppression, and slavery.

Part III: Life Application

1. How do you feel when people overlook, hurt, exploit, or abuse you? These deep disappointments and afflictions can help you to sympathize with those who go through similar experiences in life. How can you effectively encourage these suffering people? What is the best remedy for life's disappointments?

2. How can you effectively respond to the abuse of power in your workplace or in the church?

3. Imagine what would happen if Moses' parents and Miriam had not trusted God and had lacked the courage to hide their baby. What would have happened to God's plan? How would God have reacted in this hypothetical situation? Would another Moses have stood up?

4. How was it possible that Moses, after so many years of living in luxury and in a pagan home, decided to suffer with God's people for a season?

5. Those who bow down before God do not need to fear to stand before kings. They have made God's will first in their lives; so, they go forward, courageously and boldly, to keep God's commandments. What does it mean that Moses did not fear Pharaoh but God? How do you understand the paradoxical statement that because Moses saw "Him who is invisible" (*NKJV*), he was faithful to Him (*Heb. 11:27, NIV*)? How can you see God with the inward eye of faith?

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 “*’ehjeheh ’asher ’ehjeheh*,” 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 *’ehjeheh* 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 Philipians 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 3:7, 8*

Study Focus: *Exod. 3:1–4:31*

Introduction: God revealed Himself to Moses, calling him to be His servant who would deliver His people from Egypt and lead them to the Promised Land. Moses is overwhelmed with this new task and asks God to choose someone else.

Lesson Themes

In our study of Exodus 3 and 4, let us underline one crucial fact: When God calls His people to do a specific task, He also equips and enables them to do it. Calling and empowering go hand in hand. The Lord gives needed spiritual gifts and skills. We do not need to worry, even though the work can be enormous and far beyond our abilities. God is in charge. We need to let God be God in our lives and completely rely on His promises. We can trust Him. It is our responsibility to follow His lead and obey.

The structure of these two chapters, dealing with God's intervention in favor of His people, may be divided into four principal parts:

- A. God's meeting with Moses (*Exod. 3:1–4:17*), which has an introduction and commission (*Exod. 3:1–10*) and four sections dealing with the dialogue between the Lord and Moses: (1) Exodus 3:11, 12; (2) Exodus 3:13–22; (3) Exodus 4:1–9; and (4) Exodus 4:10–12, as well as an epilogue: Moses' last plea, God's anger, and His sending Aaron to Moses for support (*Exod. 4:13–17*).
- B. Moses' return to Egypt, with his wife and two sons, and God's assurance to Moses of His help (*Exod. 4:18–23*).
- C. Problem with circumcision (*Exod. 4:24–26*).
- D. Moses' meetings with Aaron, the elders, and, finally, with the Israelites (*Exod. 4:27–31*).

Great and mighty acts of God are anticipated. God's people believe and worship the living God who will work for their redemption.

Part II: Commentary

The most transformative event in Moses' life was his personal encounter with the Lord during the burning bush experience. This incident dramatically altered his life. At the time of the event, he was 80 years old, and he

lived a fulfilling, stable, and well-adjusted life. He was married, had two sons, lived in Midian, and was useful to the Lord. In his quiet time, while taking care of sheep, he was inspired by God to write two biblical books: Job and Genesis. Clearly, Moses was satisfied with his family life and walk with the Lord. Then comes a shocking disturbance to his peaceful routine of everyday life: Moses sees a burning bush that is not consumed by the flames that engulf it.

When the Lord caught Moses' attention, He told him how concerned He was with the Israelites' situation in Egypt. God spoke about their misery, oppression, slavery, crying out for help, and suffering. "I have come down to rescue them" (*Exod. 3:8, NIV*), the Lord declared. He called the Israelites "my people" (*Exod. 3:10*) and wanted to lead His people to a new land. We call it the Promised Land because God gave His word to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would inherit Canaan. The time had come for God to act, and Moses would be the instrument through whom He would fulfill His promise.

Moses was called by God Himself to go back to Egypt, a land from which he fled in order to save his own life 40 years previously (in 1490 B.C.). Moses was now to meet with Pharaoh Thutmose III (1504–1450 B.C.), whom he personally knew from the time when he grew up and lived in the king's palace. Moses' adoptive mother, Hatshepsut, had died in 1482 B.C. When God asked Moses to go back and work with Him to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, He gave two commands to Moses: " 'So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt' " (*Exod. 3:10, NIV*). From this verse, we may observe that God used two imperatives that are not as clear in our modern translations. God told Moses emphatically: (1) " 'Go!' "; and (2) " 'Bring my people . . . out of Egypt.' " The drama of Moses' calling thus unfolded.

Moses' Four Excuses and God's Four Promises

1. " 'Who Am I?' " versus " 'I Will Be With You' " (*Exod. 3:11, 12*)

When Moses hears these two commands ("Go!" and " 'Bring my people out of Egypt' " (*NIV*)), he is initially unwilling to submit and conform to them. Moses employs four strategies to relieve himself of the enormous burden of this commission. First, he hides behind his humility and asks an excellent question: " 'Who am I?' " It is important to know our insufficiency and inability to do what God requires us to perform. The power to follow His leadership is not in us but outside of us; it is in God's equipping us when we humbly follow Him. However, Moses goes beyond this recognition to seek his way out of the divine charge.

God, in response, assures Moses that He will be with him (the same phrase " 'I will be' " is used in verses 12 and 14), and gives him a sign

by stating that Moses and the Israelites will worship God on this very mountain, Mount Sinai, upon which they now meet. This promise is all-inclusive. Everything needed is included in God's presence with His people. The "Immanuel" motif ("God with us") is the most important promise.

2. "What Is Your Name?" versus "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:13–22, NIV)

Moses tenders his second excuse by asking for the meaning of God's name YHWH: "What is Your Name?" This time he is hiding behind the ignorance of God's people, rightly claiming that they do not know God personally; thus, how will they be able to know Moses is God's appointed leader?

The Lord patiently explains that He is eternal, personal, and the real God. He is the God of history who led Israel's forefathers. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who communicated with them and took care of them in His love and mercy. He is the God who gave them His promise that He would bring them to "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3:17), with God's abundant blessings. He is the Lord. The God of the Hebrews. God gave them the promise that when they left Egypt, they would not go empty-handed but with many precious gifts that had been withheld from them during the time when they were enslaved.

3. "What If They Do Not Believe Me Or Listen?" (NIV) versus Mighty Signs of God (Exod. 4:1–9)

Moses continues with his third objection by pointing to the hesitancy of the Israelites: "Suppose that they will not listen and believe me? What then?" In response, God tells him that He will enable him to perform two miracles that will be tangible signs and evidence that God has sent him and will deliver His people from Egypt: (1) Moses will be able to change his staff into a snake and back into a staff; and (2) he will put his hand into his bosom, take it out leprous, then return it to be healed.

4. "I Am Not Eloquent" (Exod. 4:10, ESV) versus "I Will Help You Speak" (Exod. 4:12, NIV)

Moses' fourth pretext for not going to Egypt is simple: "I am not a good speaker. I have never been eloquent." Moses is pleading with the Lord that he is slow in formulating arguments and is not fluent in the Egyptian and Hebrew languages.

Understandably, he has not used the Egyptian language for four decades. God, in response, assures Moses that He will give him the ability to express things persuasively and articulately because He is the Creator. As such, God will, thus, empower Moses for this task: “ ‘I will help you speak [literally, I will be with your mouth] and teach you what to say’ ” (*Exod. 4:12, NIV*). (This promise reminds us of a similar story in Jeremiah 1:5–8.)

Exodus 4:13–17 describes Moses’ final excuse and God’s reaction to it. Moses is cornered. All his excuses were powerfully refuted by God Himself. What will Moses do? He must clearly define his position by answering God’s call, either with a yes or a no. To our shock, Moses refuses to follow God’s orders, even after receiving exceptional promises from God. Moses is not willing to go: “ ‘Please send someone else’ ” (*Exod. 4:13, NIV*).

Now the roles are reversed. Moses not only rejects God’s imperatives, but he dares to command God with his own imperative, even though he softens it with the word *please*:

“ ‘Please send someone else.’ ” The one who should obey gives directives to God instead. What a contradiction!

At this moment, the biblical text states that “the LORD’s anger burned against Moses” (*Exod. 4:14, NIV*). Yet, God presents a solution: it will be in the person of Aaron, Moses’ brother, who “ ‘is already on his way to meet you’ ” (*Exod. 4:14, NIV*). God knew Moses’ negative answer in advance and had already sent Aaron to Moses to encourage them to work together to fulfill God’s commission. Aaron will be Moses’ “mouth,” i.e., his spokesperson who will communicate God’s word to Pharaoh and the people. What a loving and gracious Lord! He provides a solution where we see only darkness.

With great hesitancy, Moses follows God’s instructions. We do not read of Moses’ answer to the divine solution, but we discover, in the following verses, that Moses goes to Egypt. As a good family man, he first speaks with Jethro about his divine appointment, and Jethro sends him to Egypt with his approval and blessing. Thus, Moses goes forward. From here on out, things will move forward in unexpected, and unanticipated, ways.

Part III: Life Application

1. Everything in our lives depends on our picture of God. Who is God for you? How do you see and understand God’s presence in

your life? What kind of picture of God do you cultivate?

2. The most important thing for the Lord is not a thing, possession, accomplishment, agenda, or performance; it is relationships. The living God is the God of relationships. Human relationships start with a vertical relationship with Him and translate into horizontal relationships with one another. How did Moses' encounter with God make him a new person and a great leader?

3. God's calling on our lives is like a broad highway with different paths. Usually, the most demanding task or calling in life can help us to realize that this task or calling is what God wants us to do. The Lord never leads us on an easy or self-centered path. He wants our growth and what is best for us. His Word commands us to go forward, even though the task may look overwhelming or beyond our abilities to perform. How can you recognize and be sure that you follow His calling and vocation in life?

4. We want to do God's will according to His plan and vision for us. What excuse do you proffer to God that prevents you from accepting His path for your life? What Bible promises do you need to claim to give you hope and courage on your journey with Him? How do these promises encourage you in your service to others?

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:

- ① 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?
- ② 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?
- ③ 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. Antônio Cuchata received strict orders from his father to keep the monkeys away. However, Antônio 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 Antônio do? He prayed and went to church.

Vervet monkeys were a severe problem for small farmers in the coastal province where Antônio 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 Antônio 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 Antônio that he also should help on Saturdays.

Antônio 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, Antônio 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.

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

Father refused to acknowledge the miracle, but Antônio 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 5:1, 2*

Study Focus: *Exod. 5:1–7:7*

Introduction: Israel's situation alters in unexpected ways. God promised that He would lead His people out of Egypt, but instead they saw their lives immediately worsen. Pharaoh made unreasonable demands upon them. Moreover, he refused to let the Israelites go and worship their God. Their circumstances were so bad that the Israelites “did not listen” to Moses “because of their discouragement and harsh labor” (*Exod. 6:9, NIV*). Yet, God asked Moses to speak to Pharaoh again. But Moses objected twice to God's command: “ ‘Why would Pharaoh listen to me’ ” (*Exod. 6:12, 30, NIV*) when even the Israelites do not pay attention to what I say? And “ ‘I'm such a clumsy speaker!’ ” (*Exod. 6:12, NLT*).

There are different dialogues in this section of the book of Exodus (*Exod. 5:1–7:7*). Encounters or dialogues between different individuals and groups prepare the stage for the mighty display of God's glory, as follows:

1. Moses and Aaron speak with Pharaoh (*Exod. 5:1–5*).
2. Pharaoh speaks with the slave masters and the Israelite supervisors (*Exod. 5:6–9*).
3. The slave masters and the Israelite supervisors speak with the people (*Exod. 5:10–14*).
4. The Israelite supervisors speak with Pharaoh (*Exod. 5:15–18*).
5. The Israelite supervisors speak with Moses and Aaron (*Exod. 5:19–21*).
6. Moses speaks with the Lord (*Exod. 5:22–6:8*).
7. Moses speaks with the people (*Exod. 6:9*).
8. The Lord speaks with Moses (*Exod. 6:10–12*).

These dialogues are followed by statements that the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron (*Exod. 6:13, 26, 27*). Between these statements is sandwiched the family record of Moses and Aaron (*Exod. 6:14–25*). Then, again, the dialogue between Moses and the Lord is recorded as a prelude to the 10 plagues (*Exod. 6:28–7:5*). In the concluding part of this section, Moses' and Aaron's obedience is positively emphasized, for they did everything precisely as the Lord commanded them to do (*Exod. 7:6*). Along with this approbation, their ages are mentioned: Moses is 80 and Aaron, 83 (*Exod. 7:7*).

We can thus conclude that there is no retirement from the service of God. He needs everyone to work closely with Him to advance His cause: young and old, male and female, children and adults, free and enslaved, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, people in high places with influential positions and common workers. Everyone can do his or her part, and together we can fulfill God's mission for us.

Lesson Themes

In spite of the fact that Pharaoh says a clear no to God's demand to " 'let my people go,' " God prepares a way out for His people. However, the people lose their faith. Even Moses argues with God, asking why things are worse: " 'Why . . . have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me?' " (*Exod. 5:22, NIV*). The reason for these hard questions lies in the fact that, after the first direct encounter with Pharaoh, things became more complicated, and life for the Israelites worsened. Neither Moses nor the Israelites expected such a dilemma. They anticipated a quick deliverance from slavery because their God was the mighty Creator who could do things no one else can do. What a devastating disappointment! Nevertheless, God prepares the scene of deliverance and readies Moses and Aaron for a new confrontation with the king.

Part II: Commentary

The memory verse sets the scene for the drama that is about to unfold.

Enter Moses, who, after 40 years of absence from Egypt, again enters Pharaoh's palace (in the year 1450 B.C.). Moses and Aaron visit Pharaoh Thutmose III and confront him with God's command: " 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me' " (*Exod. 7:16, NIV*). Pharaoh refuses to acknowledge the Lord's existence or His authority. He considers himself a god, worships a plethora of human-fabricated gods, and does not want to accept the request of the living God of the Hebrews. His arrogant reply defines Egypt's power as a materialistic pagan culture that worships its own gods in the form of idols. Pharaoh denies God's sovereignty and defies His very existence: " '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' "; " 'Why do you take [literally, let go free] the people from their work? . . . and . . . make them rest [Hebrew: *shabat*] from their labor' " (*Exod. 5:2, 4, 5, NKJV*)? The Hebrew word for Egypt is *mitsrayim*, which means a land of "double grip," referring to severe enslavement and the grasping of authority in order to command, rule, and tell others what to do.

In his response to the Lord's demand, Pharaoh mentions that Moses and Aaron want to stop the work of the Israelites and make them rest from their labor. The Hebrew word *shabat* is pointing to the Sabbath rest, according to some Jewish and Christian interpreters. The phrase "rest from" work is found only in one other place, namely in Genesis 2:2, 3 (repeated twice). Interestingly, Pharaoh also disagrees with Moses' and Aaron's request to free (from *para'*, "to let go" or "to let loose") the people. (Interestingly, the verb *para'* has, in Hebrew, the same consonants as

the word “pharaoh,” so behind the king’s response may be a pun: “Why do you act like Pharaoh by making the people go free from their work?”

King Thutmose III was 2 years old when he was placed by a priest on the Egyptian throne, following his father Thutmose II’s death, in 1504 B.C. Thutmose’s ascension to the throne was most probably inaugurated in order to prevent Moses from becoming the king. At the time, Moses, an adopted son of Pharaoh Hatshepsut, was 26 years old. Thutmose III was co-regent with his stepmother Hatshepsut until 1482 B.C., when she died. At the time of her death, Moses was in Midian. Thutmose III was 24 when he began his solo reign. He destroyed almost all monuments and statues with Hatshepsut’s name or picture and is also known for his successful military campaigns. He is considered to be the greatest military ruler in ancient Egypt. He was also an exceptional builder. In 1450 B.C., at the time of the Exodus, he was 56 years old.

God’s Covenant

Before God brings the Israelites out of Egypt, He assures them that He will fulfill the covenant He established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He promised their forefathers that He would “ ‘give them the land of Canaan’ ” (*Exod. 6:4, NKJV*), as mentioned in Genesis 12:7 and Genesis 17:8. God remembers this covenant, and because the fullness of time has come, things will now move forward. He will intervene for His people. The Lord encourages Moses to firmly declare to His people that His promise will certainly occur. His word will be fulfilled. This fresh assurance is recorded in the crucial passage of Exodus 6:6–8.

God begins with the solemn statement of self-identification: “ ‘I am the LORD.’ ” By this recognition formula, which is repeated 15 times in Exodus, especially in the section dealing with the plagues (*Exod. 6:2, 6, 7, 8, 29; Exod. 7:5, 17; Exod. 10:2; Exod. 12:12; Exod. 14:4, 18; Exod. 15:26; Exod. 16:12; Exod. 29:46; Exod. 31:13*), the Lord proclaims His intimate closeness with, and loving care for, His people. Such closeness and care will be recognized by the Israelites and also by the Egyptians. He will deliver His people as promised and liberate them from Egyptian bondage.

The Lord stresses four different redemptive actions for His people and formally promises the following:

1. “I will bring you out [*hiphil* form of *yatsa'* means “cause to go out”] from under the yoke of the Egyptians.”
2. “I will free [*hiphil* form of *natsal* means “rescue,” “snatch out,” “deliver,” “save”] you from being slaves to them.”
3. “I will redeem [*ga'al*] you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.”

4. “I will take [*laqakh*] you as my own people, and I will be [*hayah*] your God.”

These promises culminate with the covenant formula that underscores the intimate relationship and loving unity between the Lord and His people. This relationship is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham (*Gen. 17:7, 8*). (In the Jewish Passover Seder liturgy, this biblical passage plays a key role, symbolized by four cups that are drunk by those who celebrate this act of redemption from Egyptian slavery.)

Then, for the first time in the book of Exodus, the Lord proclaims that “you,” meaning the Israelites, will “ ‘know that I am the LORD your God’ ” (*Exod. 6:7, NKJV*). Before, it was always the Lord who knew the oppression, suffering, and affliction of His people, but now His people will “know” their God.

The Lord adds two more promises: (1) “ ‘I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob’ ” (*Exod. 6:8, NIV*); and (2) “ ‘I will give it to you as a possession’ ” (*Exod. 6:8, NIV*). The staccato repetition of the divine “I” is the clear-cut guarantee that God’s Word will happen. Four times in Exodus 6:2–8, the recognition formula “ ‘I am the LORD’ ” appears. This phrase occurs at the very beginning and at the very end of this passage as an *inclusio*, or umbrella structure (*Exod. 6:2, 8*), as well as in two additional places in Exodus 6:6, 7.

The reaction of the Israelites, according to verse 9, is very sad. Moses speaks to the Israelites, but they are so discouraged that they do not listen to the Lord’s reassuring words. However, God’s redeeming actions are about to be revealed in all their glorious reality.

Part III: Life Application

1. What lessons can you draw from Moses’ very open, almost confrontational dialogue with the Lord? How does this impact your own walk with the Lord? How can we communicate our thoughts, feelings, and inner desires to Him in a sincere manner? How may we speak with Him about our negative emotions, such as disappointment, bitterness, frustration, hatred, envy, and anger?
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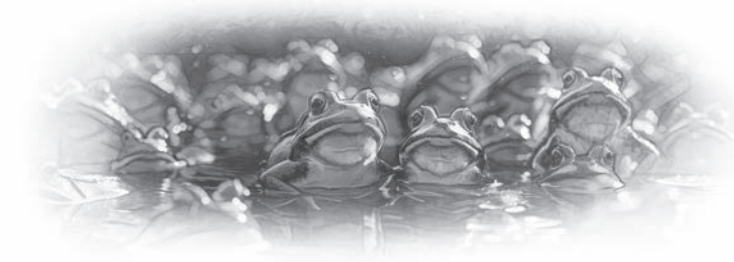
2. We do not believe in fate or determinism. We also do not believe in chance or luck. We do believe in God's trustworthy leadership when we sincerely and honestly ask Him for it. How can we learn to trust God more and rely fully upon His leadership?

3. God is not calling us to be successful; He calls us to be faithful. We need to be faithful to His calling to do what is needed in order to be His good witnesses in whatever stage of growth we find ourselves. Our success and prosperity depend on Him. How can you, without being confrontational, help and lead others to see God's hand and interventions in their lives?

4. Egypt plays a crucial role in biblical prophecies. What realities in our postmodern, mega-modern age does the symbol of Egypt direct us to and confront us with?

5. Why is it that our expectations for God's interventions and actions are usually not fulfilled? Why does He so often act only when all hopes are shattered?

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 how 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 9:35*

Study Focus: *Exod. 7:8–10:29*

Introduction: In our study this week, we encounter the God of miracles and the signs and wonders that He performs. Additionally, we will consider nine of the ten plagues that He unleashes as divine judgments upon Egypt. Present these elements to your class in the setting of the great controversy—the spiritual battle between forces of good and evil, light and darkness, Christ and Satan, the living God and idols. This spiritual warfare began on earth in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve fell into sin. God promised a victorious outcome to this war so that we would not forever be prey to evil (*Gen. 3:15*). From its inception, the controversy has waged between those who worship the Creator Lord and those who worship creation in its various forms. Worship of the Creator liberates humanity and frees them from the bondage of sin. Worship of creation leads to the moral degradation of humanity, created in the image of God, and ends, ultimately, in their enslavement.

In Exodus 7:8–10:29, the confrontation between the living God and Pharaoh intensifies. Pharaoh wants to demonstrate that he is, indeed, a god, as the Egyptians believed him to be. Thus, he endeavors to play the role of a sovereign monarch, who is in control and decides what is right or wrong. In contrast, God wants to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage, but, at the same time, He wishes to teach the Egyptians who He is and liberate them from slavery to their gods.

One thing must be made crystal clear: God is not against the Egyptians; He loves them as He loves everyone, with His everlasting and unselfish love. At the same time, the Sovereign Lord stands against the Egyptian gods. He intends to demonstrate that these “gods” are a human fabrication, leading people into fear and bondage. Moreover, His primary goal is to break Egypt’s dependence upon these fabricated gods in order that they might serve the living Creator and Redeemer God. However, if the people continue to associate and identify with these false gods, God’s judgment will fall, not only on their gods but on them. Their persistent idolatry will result in their punishment and, ultimately, their destruction.

God clearly declares: “ ‘I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt’ ” (*Exod. 12:12, NIV*); God’s judgment against the Egyptian gods is recounted as a historical fact in Numbers 33:4. Each plague, or judgment, was usually aimed against multiple Egyptian gods that captured the people’s imagination, thoughts, and feelings; influenced their behavior and social life; and led to their enslavement to sin in a comprehensive way.

The entire person was thus captured. Thereafter, the soul lived in complete submission to an idolatrous lifestyle. This lifestyle, controlled by magic, stood in diametrical opposition to the freedom of worship that springs from the living, and loving, Creator God.

Part II: Commentary

Signs and Wonders

In Exodus 7:3, we read that the Lord will multiply both “signs and wonders” (*NIV*) before all the people in order that they might understand who He is. Exodus 7:3 is the only text in Exodus in which these two terms, “signs” and “wonders,” are combined. The word “sign” or “signs” occurs 16 times in the book of Exodus (*Exod. 3:12; Exod. 4:8 [twice], 9, 17, 28, 30; Exod. 7:3; Exod. 8:19, NABRE; Exod. 10:1, 2; Exod. 12:13, NIV; Exod. 13:9, 16; Exod. 31:13, 17*). In these instances, it is used to emphasize two things: namely, that Moses will perform different signs before Pharaoh (*Exod. 10:1, 2*), and that the Passover blood will be a sign of life, causing the destroying angel to pass over the homes under its protection (*Exod. 12:13*). The term “wonder” is used in reference to what God will do before Pharaoh, despite the hardening of his heart (*Exod. 4:21*). In the context of plagues, this term is structurally crucial because it appears twice at the beginning of nine plagues (*Exod. 7:3, 9*) and, again, twice at the end of the ninth plague (*Exod. 11:9, 10*).

There are significant plague characteristics:

1. The first nine plagues may be divided into three clusters, or groups, of three plagues. The tenth plague is unique and separated from the rest. The people will need a special time and provision to face it.
2. The first nine plagues affected all three habitats created by God in Genesis 1: the heavens (plagues seven to nine), the earth (plagues three to six), and the waters (plagues one and two). Collectively, these plagues allude to de-creation.
3. The first nine plagues intensify, becoming more and more severe in the process of time, as Pharaoh stubbornly refuses to let God’s people go in order that they might freely worship their Creator Lord. The first three plagues were mild, quick, and did not cause death. The next three plagues (plagues four to six) were more serious and harmful, as they destroyed livestock and afflicted humans with skin sores. The following three plagues (plagues seven to nine) were more devastating, involving the death of people and animals but also the destruction of crops.
4. Generally speaking, each plague fell after a clear warning and plea

to surrender to the Lord's demand. Surprises occurred, but devastation was announced beforehand and could be avoided. An exceptional warning is given before the first two plagues and the tenth, but see also transparent warnings in the introductions to plagues four, five, seven, and eight.

5. Before plagues three, six, and nine, there is little to no confrontation with Pharaoh.
6. The first three plagues fell on the Egyptians and the Israelites, but all the remaining plagues came only upon the Egyptians.
7. Prior to the occurrence of the first plague, God performed a miracle before Pharaoh: Aaron's staff became a snake that ate all the magicians' snakes. Yet, "Pharaoh's heart became hard" (*Exod. 7:13, NIV*).
8. The last plague was the most destructive because each family that was not under the protection of the blood of the lamb was affected by the death of its firstborn son. Before the last plague fell, God, in His mercy, gave the people three days of darkness for reflection, meditation, and repentance, as well as instruction on how to avoid the final devastation.
9. It is after the sixth plague that the record declares that "the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart" (*Exod. 9:12, NIV; see also Exod. 10:1, 20, 27; Exod. 11:10; and also Exod. 14:4, 8, 17*). During the first five plagues, it was Pharaoh who hardened his heart (*Exod. 7:13, 14, 22; Exod. 8:15, 19, 32; Exod. 9:7; Exod. 9:35*). Before the actual story about the ten plagues, there are two predictions by God stating that He, the Lord, will harden Pharaoh's heart (*Exod. 4:21, Exod. 7:3*).
10. Magicians could imitate only the first two plagues. When the third plague occurred, they aptly stated: "This is the finger of God" (*Exod. 8:19*). Later they themselves suffered with boils (*Exod. 9:11; see also the urging of Pharaoh's "officials," Exod. 10:7, NIV*).
11. The plagues also can be gathered into pairs: plagues one and two are connected with the river Nile; plagues three and four are flying insects (gnats/mosquitoes and flies); plagues five and six resemble each other, with pestilence occurring on animals and boils on humans; plagues seven and eight describe damage to crops; plagues nine and ten are related to darkness—one to physical darkness and the other to the ultimate darkness, namely, death of the firstborn.
12. It is interesting to note that the Lord specifically invited Pharaoh seven times to " 'Let my people go' " (*Exod. 5:1; Exod. 7:16; Exod. 8:1, 20; Exod. 9:1, 13; Exod. 10:3*) and once used a negative conditional phrase: " 'If you do not let my people go, I will send . . . ' " (*Exod. 8:21, NIV*). Pharaoh consented after the second, fourth, seventh, and ninth plagues (*Exod. 8:8, Exod. 8:25–28, Exod. 9:28, Exod. 10:24*), but, in the end, refused to let the people go to worship the Lord (*Exod. 8:15, Exod.*

8:32, *Exod. 9:35, Exod. 10:27*). He even asked Moses to pray to end specific plagues and to pray also for him (*Exod. 8:8, 28; Exod. 9:28; Exod. 10:16, 17*). Only after the tenth plague did he summon Moses and Aaron and commanded them: “And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also” (*Exod. 12:31, 32*).

As we have said, all these calamities related to God’s judgment against the Egyptian gods and upon those who clung to them. One should not overlook the fact that in the midst of all these calamities is the declaration of God’s powerful presence in the land of Egypt. He wanted to make it clear that there was a difference between those who follow Him and those who go against Him: “ ‘If you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. . . . But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth’ ” (*Exod. 8:21, 22, ESV*).

The prophet Isaiah speaks about God’s love and future plans for Egypt in astounding words: “In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance’ ” (*Isa. 19:23–25, NIV*).

Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart

The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart fascinates students of the Bible. We must stress that God did not predetermine Pharaoh’s decisions. The choices were his. He was not predestined to stubbornly refuse to follow God’s instructions and be doomed to perdition. God gives freedom of choice to every individual and enables people to respond to His message of love and offer of grace. He does not force people to obey or disobey Him.

The complete textual survey regarding the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (see point 9 in previous section) provides the following result: in the process of hardening, it was first Pharaoh himself who stubbornly refused to humble himself before God (*Exod. 10:3*). It was his decision, his willful disobedience, that led him to go beyond the irreversible point of no return. His character became fixed. The divine call to him to let the Israelites go and worship the living God only added fuel to the proverbial fire in his heart, kindled against the Almighty and His servant Moses.

Part III: Life Application

1. The evidence was piling up that the Lord was a sovereign God who wanted to deliver His people and lead them out of Egypt. What is in our hearts and lives that may cause us to stubbornly refuse all of God's promptings to repent and follow Him?

2. What is so attractive about idolatry? Why was it so difficult for the Egyptians to break with their idolatry, even after they saw what kind of devastation it brought?

3. Humans are ingenious about creating their own idols. Virtually anything can be transformed into an idol. What is an idol? How do we make our own gods and bow down before them? What principles can one describe and detect behind such degrading behavior? Why does God stand so vehemently against idolatry?

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?

Healing the Body

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 worshiping 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 (Ps. 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 12:26, 27*

Study Focus: *Exod. 11:1–12:30*

Introduction: The tenth plague is the climax of the plagues. The people must properly prepare themselves beforehand for its coming because lives are at stake. Either life or death awaits the firstborn, thus placing families on highest alert. Each family will answer a crucial question: Will we trust the Lord and His provision for life, or will we ignore it? The only path to life is marked by accepting the blood of the innocent lamb. At this time, the celebration of the Passover is inaugurated, so that, together, whole families may experience God's deliverance.

Teachers, do not forget to explain to your class members the main point of the lesson: Jesus Christ is the Passover Lamb (*John 1:29, 1 Cor. 5:7*). Only in Him do we have true life and life eternal. This life was secured on the cross (*John 11:25; John 12:32; Rom. 5:6–8; 1 Cor. 1:18, 23, 24*). The celebration of the Passover led Jesus to establish for His followers a new ceremony. At the Last Supper, Jesus ate with His disciples the lamb, which pointed to Him. In so doing, Christ redirected His followers' focus to a new celebration that would repeatedly remind them of the most important event in earth's history and the history of the entire universe: His ultimate sacrifice on the cross on our behalf. We celebrate this communion during the Lord's Supper when we remember His life and death for us (*Matt. 26:26–29, 1 Cor. 11:23–26*). This Passover redesign from the sacrificial lamb to the living Lamb, Jesus Christ, is an unfathomable lesson to be keenly remembered during Communion, as well as in one's daily personal acceptance of Christ's substitutionary death for humanity (*2 Cor. 5:15, 21*).

Part II: Commentary

Historical Background

Thutmose III (1504–1450 B.C.) appointed his son Amenhotep II (1453–1425 B.C.), who was not his oldest son, to be co-regent with him, but only for a short period of time. Amenhotep II was probably not present in Egypt during the ten plagues, as he was engaged in a military campaign. After his return, he would receive the devastating news that his father had died in the Red Sea while pursuing the Israelites (*Exod. 14:28, Exod. 15:4, Ps. 136:15*) and that his brother, the firstborn of Pharaoh, had died in the tenth plague (*Exod. 12:29*). God's executive judgment struck, as predicted, in a three-pronged attack on

the firstborn Egyptian males, their animals, and their gods (*Exod. 12:12*). Pharaoh was clearly warned, but he defied both the divine admonishment and Moses' repeated pleas to submit to God's request so that this calamity might be averted. Pharaoh stubbornly refused to obey God, and his recalcitrance led to further unprecedented devastation for the Egyptians. Every family was affected. The influence of this tragedy was immediate, and the Egyptians begged the Israelites to leave Egypt.

The Passover Lamb

Many do not understand the true meaning and purpose of sacrifices and the motives behind them. There is a vast difference between pagan sacrifices, offered in temples or houses to different gods in the form of idols, and the genuine sacrifice offered to the living God. God regulates these offerings and gives precise instructions on why and how they should be offered to Him, along with what should be offered and who should officiate over the sacrifices.

Behind all unbiblical sacrifices lies the understanding that they are food for the gods, who depended on them for sustenance. In contrast, the living God provides food to everyone (*Ps. 104:14–27*); so, He does not need sacrifices to feed and sustain Him. In short, sacrifices are not food for the God of heaven.

But the principal difference between pagan sacrifices and biblical sacrifices goes much deeper. The pagan's underlying motive is that he sees his sacrificial gifts as a powerful means to influence the gods, pacify their anger, and appease them so that he might receive their favor. Pagan worshipers needed to bring offerings to the gods in order to appease them, to obtain their blessing, and to calm them in order to prevent the gods from harming them. Pagan worshipers needed to give their gods the best so that they might receive, in return, divine protection, prosperity, fertility, security, and favor.

In contrast, sacrifices, according to the Bible, are God's means and provision for us to approach Him. God condescends to us and provides reconciliation and salvation. When believers sacrifice, they are not manipulating God. They give in view of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus to whom all sacrifices point. Thus, they accept Christ as their Savior who alone can forgive their sins, save them, and bless them.

At the time of the Exodus, the blood on the doorposts was a sign (*Exod. 12:13*) that the particular household acknowledged the Lord and wanted to live according to His teachings. This sign of the blood brought the judgment of salvation to the family. God proclaimed: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt" (*Exod. 12:13, NIV*). This judgment was not one of condemnation or destruction but a positive judgment

of redemption that was experienced by believers. In the English language, there is a pun in the word “Passover,” which is a composite of two words: “pass” and “over,” thus “Passover.” The biblical translation plays with this pun and underlines the fact that the Lord’s judgment of destruction will “pass over” those believers who obeyed God by placing a blood sign on their doorposts.

The believing families celebrated the Passover as the judgment of salvation. All this blood has a deeper meaning. The bloody sacrifice was pointing to the real Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, who would sacrifice Himself for humanity once for all. Thus, those who accept Him as their personal Savior receive the promise that they will live for eternity with Him (*John 3:16, 1 John 5:11–13*).

God can accept a sacrifice given only from a contrite, humble, and thankful heart. The gratitude for what God has done (not for what I have achieved or performed) must be the key motif that springs out of a heart that praises God for the gift of salvation. The prophet Isaiah stresses that we should encourage one another because God’s judgment on behalf of His people is not condemnatory but redemptive. Our loving, gracious, and caring Lord teaches believers how to understand His judgment: “Say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you’ ” (*Isa. 35:4, NIV*).

Teaching Our Children God’s Way

God gives precise instruction to His people on how to teach the next generation about Him and His mighty acts. He tells them to celebrate the Passover each year in a very personal way. What happened to their forefathers must be recounted as their own Exodus experience, as if they were the slaves who were redeemed by the Lord and escaped from Egypt. Parents need to teach their children, and the next generation needs to teach their children, perpetually. They need to live it, not only in words but in actions. The experience must always be fresh; the history must be actualized as if it happened right now. The historical event must become existential and personal. In this way, history will be relived, memory recharged, and what happened will not be forgotten. Moses said: “ ‘When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, “What does this ceremony mean to you?” then tell them, “It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians” ’ ” (*Exod. 12:25–27, NIV*). In order to remember, the Israelites were instructed to celebrate the Passover ritual every year.

This model is the standard by which we are to teach our children and grandchildren today. This pattern is given to us to imitate. Asaph encourages: “I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments” (*Ps. 78:2–7*). David states what we should do in these words: “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (*Ps. 145:4*). The story of redemption and deliverance needs to be relevantly repeated and learned by each new generation. It takes only one generation to neglect this task for their children and families to lose the knowledge of God. Then the understanding of His teachings will dramatically diminish, and the pursuit of a godly life will be in jeopardy.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. The stubbornness of Pharaoh, together with the recalcitrance of many Egyptians, teaches us that even great miracles and wonders do not have the power to make people believe and change their lives. Jesus Himself said: “ ‘ “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” ’ ” (*Luke 16:31, ESV*). What was, and is now, in your life journey that led you to follow God wholeheartedly? How can we help others not to depend on miracles but to take God’s Word seriously?**

2. Because God loves us, He instructs us about the devastating consequences of disobedience if we tenaciously stay in sin. Persistence in wrong is deadly; for this reason, God graciously calls us to repent and accept His provision for salvation. How can we be sure that we are surrendered completely to Jesus and are saved? How can we take seriously God's loving warnings not to follow a path that leads to destruction? The traps of distractions are vast. How does one avoid them?

3. Moses, in his sermon to the Israelites, emphasizes that we need to teach and educate our children and grandchildren all the time about God's love, kindness, and truth: " 'You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise' " (*Deut. 6:7, ESV*). How can we teach our children in an attractive and meaningful way, without being annoying or forceful, so that our families may be full of the knowledge of God?

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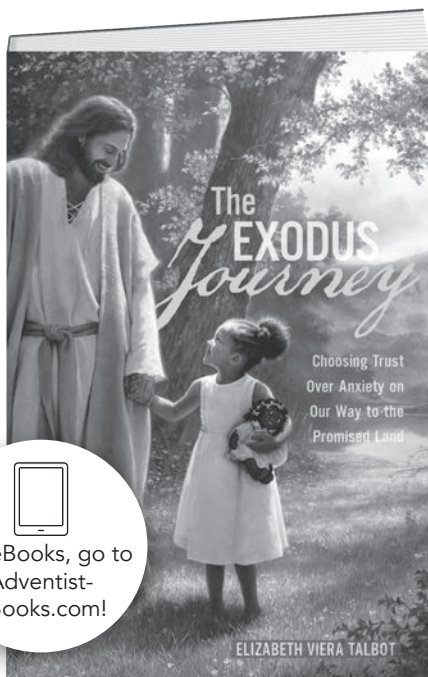
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Through *the* Red Sea



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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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)?
- ❸ 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 14:13, 14, 30, 31*

Study Focus: *Exod. 12:31–15:21*

Introduction: In the history of God’s people, the exodus from Egypt is the most extraordinary Old Testament story, with God intervening in the most spectacular way. After eating the Passover lamb, the Israelites were ready to leave Egypt. Pharaoh finally gave his consent. In great distress, he gives the order to Moses and Aaron to go and worship their God. Everyone is included—men, women, children, as well as their herds and flocks. Previously, Moses had correctly refused to depart if the Israelites were not allowed to leave as complete families, along with their animals. In addition, God makes provisions for the future on behalf of His people: they did not leave Egypt empty-handed.

Even as the Egyptians begged the Israelites to leave the country, they gave them all the articles they asked for: silver, gold, and clothing, just as Moses had instructed them to do. These articles were compensation for wages that had been unjustly withheld. Later, the Israelites would face a choice of how to use these gifts, either by giving the fabric, precious ornaments, gold, silver, and other metals to build the tabernacle (*Exod. 25:1–7*) or by giving the gold jewelry to Aaron to fabricate the idol of the golden calf (*Exod. 32:1, 2*).

The theme of actual “going out” is underlined at the beginning of the story (*Exod. 12:37–41*), in its progression (*Exod. 13:21, 22*), and at its conclusion, where it is highlighted that “the Lord saved Israel” (*Exod. 14:30, 31*).

Part II: Commentary

Historical Background

By way of understanding the historical background to Exodus 12, consider the following two points:

A. After 430 years of sojourning in Egypt, Israel is now free to travel to the Promised Land. Because of the double occurrence of the Hebrew word *wayehi*, “it happened,” “it was,” in Exodus 12:41, the text emphasizes this period of time by stating that “indeed [or yes], to the exact day they went out.” First, it was only Joseph in Egypt; then Jacob’s entire family arrived. In the beginning there were 70 (*Exod. 1:5*), but now they are “about six

hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children” (*Exod. 12:37, NIV; compare with Exod. 38:26*), which means that a company of around two million people was marching out of Egypt. Moses was surely trained in military strategy during his stay in Pharaoh’s palace, so he knew how to organize such a huge number of people. The biblical text mentions that they were marching “out of Egypt by their divisions” (*Exod. 12:51, NIV; compare with Exod. 6:26, NIV; Exod. 7:4, NIV; Exod. 12:17, 41, NIV*), which means as “military” units or battalions. The Exodus was well organized; however, one needs to remember that the caravan could travel only as fast as its “weakest” members, usually children, elderly people, flocks, and herds.

B. The Exodus likely occurred in March 1450 B.C., according to the best calculations by conservative scholars, which means that the 430 years would go back to 1880 B.C. How are we to understand this period of time? There are two views among conservative scholars: (1) 430 years, counted from the time of Joseph to the Exodus, and (2) 430 years, beginning with Abraham until the Exodus. (For a discussion about these two main positions regarding the long or short sojourn in Egypt [either only “in the land of Egypt,” according to the Hebrew Masoretic text, or both “in the land of Egypt” and “in the land of Canaan,” according to the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Greek translation of the Septuagint], and for the evidence preferring a short stay in Egypt, see *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 183–187, 313–315, 557.)

The Lord Will Fight for You; Be Still!

The Israelites were geographically cornered: Before them was the Red Sea. On one side were mountains, and behind them was Pharaoh’s well-trained and powerful army (for details see Ellen G. White, “The Exodus,” pp. 284, 287, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*). From this situation, humanly speaking, it was impossible to escape. The people were terrified. No wonder God, through Moses, encouraged them with, “ ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm [in your trust in the Lord] and you will see the deliverance’ ” (*Exod. 14:13, NIV*). We do not naturally know how to be still and wait for God’s intervention. We want to fight when instead we should wait for God, be silent, and advance by His grace and power.

Great tension was in the air. How would the people react? The flow of events is outstanding: God gives the command to move forward. The pillar of cloud, representing God’s invisible presence, transfers from the front to the back of the column, “coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel” (*Exod. 14:20, NIV*). Moses raises his staff. An east wind divides the water and forms dry land. The Israelites march through the sea’s water corridor. The Egyptians attempt to pursue them. But the Lord confuses Pharaoh’s army, and the entire army is drowned while the Israelites are safe on the other side of the Red Sea. Thus, they experience God’s spectacular victory in saving them.

Egypt stands for those who oppose and reject God. The Egyptians failed on two grounds: (1) they stubbornly resisted the living Lord, and (2) they desired to capture and enslave the Israelites. Greed and violence led them to destruction. There is a huge difference between serving the Lord, who gives grace, freedom, and salvation, and serving Pharaoh, which leads to blind obedience, terrifying commands, slavery, and, ultimately, to death.

The Lord Saves

At the very center of the book of Exodus is the crucial phrase: “The LORD saved Israel” (*Exod. 14:30*), which is the theological magnet, nucleus, and spring of the entire book because everything flows to it and from it. This incidence is the only time when this sentence is used in Exodus. Salvation came from the Lord. The theologically pregnant Hebrew verb *yasha'* means “save,” “rescue,” “redeem,” and appears in the name of Jesus (as well, e.g., in the names of Joshua and Isaiah), which means “the Lord saves” (*see Matt. 1:21*). God saved all the Israelites; not one was missing. In contrast, “not one” of Pharaoh’s army “survived” (*Exod. 14:28, NIV*); all died in the Red Sea. The Lord’s victory was triumphant and complete.

The Israelites reacted to their mighty deliverance by fearing the Lord and trusting in Him (*Exod. 14:31, NIV*). The text mentions that this positive response happened when they saw the display of the Lord’s great power against the Egyptians. The goal of Pharaoh and his army was probably to kill many of the Israelites as a display of their power and to bitterly enslave the rest of them again. This outcome did not happen because of God’s loving and just intervention. Israel’s response was to break into praises that were expressed in the form of a song.

The Songs of Moses and Miriam

In a climactic finale to the Exodus miracle, Moses directs the Israelites to praise the Lord through exquisite poetry, which uses rich imagery (the background of this activity is explained in Exodus 15:19). The songs of Moses and Miriam were songs of victory and thankfulness. The Lord is presented as the mighty Warrior. The culminating phrase is “‘the Lord will reign forever’ ” (*Exod. 15:18, ESV*), and because He is the highly exalted and eternal King, Moses declares that He is his strength, song, salvation, and God; so he will praise and exalt Him (*Exod. 15:1, 2*). No one is like Him: He is “majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders” (*Exod. 15:11, NIV*). Moses addresses the Lord and glorifies Him: “In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you” (*Exod. 15:7, NIV*) and continues: “‘In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling’ ” (*Exod. 15:13, NIV*). This place, referred to in Exodus 15:17, is

called the “sanctuary,” located “‘on the mountain of your inheritance.’” The poem is a prophetic song, having in view the temple in Jerusalem.

The song has seven thematic stanzas: (1) verses 1–3, the Lord’s exaltation; (2) verses 4, 5, the Lord’s victory over Pharaoh; (3) verses 6, 7, the Lord’s majestic greatness; (4) verses 8–10, the Lord’s creative power and judgment; (5) verse 11, the Lord’s uniqueness; (6) verses 12–16a, the Lord’s love and redemption from enemies; and (7) verses 16b–18, the Lord is the King and gives rest to His people in the Promised Land. In Exodus 15:6, 11, and 16, two phrases are always repeated for emphasis. The poem echoes the Creation account of Genesis 1 and 2, and thus marks a new beginning for God’s people, the creation of the liberated nation of Israel.

Miriam was regarded as a prophet. Her short song (*Exod. 15:21*) repeats many of the motifs of Moses’ song (*Exod. 15:1*). But one important detail is different. Miriam emphatically leads all the women to sing (grammatical imperative!) to the Lord, accompanied by tambourines. Her heart overflows with thankfulness, and she leads others to express the same emotion. Most likely they also sang the whole song, which was abbreviated in the written account, with the opening lines serving as the title.

On the sea of glass, the redeemed will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb (*Rev. 15:2–4*). These hymns are songs of deliverance and victory, and they reflect God’s love, justice, and power.

Later, in the New Testament, the apostle Paul will employ the imagery of passing through the waters of the Red Sea as a metaphor for Israel’s baptism in Christ (*see 1 Cor. 10:2*).

Part III: Life Application

- 1. To trust the Lord and His promises is often difficult, especially in perilous times when His help is not visible and does not come immediately. What does it mean to “stay still” in order to see God’s deliverance?**

- 2. The Lord told Moses not only to pray but to move forward. Does**

God fight for us in all situations of life, or does He expect us to do things in response to His guidance? How do you know when to wait and when to take action?

- 3. Why does God very often need to remind, and encourage, us with the command “Do not fear”? Why are we so easily discouraged?**

- 4. How could the Lord gain glory through the defeat of Pharaoh and his army? What is the glory of God? How could the Egyptians know that the Lord God was in the midst of all the calamities that befell their land?**

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 (*Ps. 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 16:28–30*

Study Focus: *Exod. 15:22–18:27*

Introduction: God’s miraculous intervention to rescue His people from bondage, an unprecedented and unrepeatable event, was to be remembered, and regularly commemorated, in the Passover. The Israelites were redeemed and free to go, but freedom is a costly commodity. God’s signs and wonders were performed on Israel’s behalf, resulting in divine judgments falling upon Egypt. These judgments were not merely punitive for the Egyptians but were instructive for the Israelites as well, helping them to know the true God and what the real, lasting values were in life. God presented Himself as a loving and just Redeemer, a mighty Warrior who had rescued Israel from slavery. These dramatic events were designed to lead His people to fully trust Him as their wise Guide and Caregiver and thus to depend upon His leadership.

After the great deliverance from Egypt, the Red Sea experience, and the splendid celebration of God’s salvation from the hands of Pharaoh and his army, God led Israel to the Desert of Shur, where they traveled for three days without finding water. Here the Israelites were presented with another test of trusting the Lord (*Exod. 15:25*). Just prior to this test, the Israelites trusted the Lord after crossing the Red Sea and seeing the defeat of Pharaoh (*Exod. 14:31*). Would they continue to stay on the path of implicit trust in God, with a confident attitude in their Leader? All that had happened in the past days and weeks should have been etched into their memories. Would they remember God’s leadership when the hardships of life struck again?

God cared for Israel like a loving parent, and He led them patiently through the desert. He had to teach them painful lessons when they murmured; yet, He lovingly provided water, quail, and manna and instructed them on how to keep the Sabbath holy.

Part II: Commentary

Exodus 15:22–18:27 describes Israel’s journey to Sinai. The passage contains five narratives: two stories are related to the gift of water. The first water narrative, at Mara, concerns making bitter water sweet (*Exod. 15:22–27*). The second water narrative concerns water springing from a rock (*Exod. 17:1–7*). In between these two stories lies miraculous gifts of

food—quail and manna—and teachings about how to keep the Sabbath (*Exod. 16:1–36*). These three wonders—water, quail, and manna—are followed by two additional accounts, namely, the Lord’s gift of victory over the Amalekites (*Exod. 17:8–16*) and Jethro’s visit, during which time he gives wise advice to Moses (*Exod. 18:1–27*).

The Gift of Water at Mara

For the first time in the book of Exodus, the Hebrew root *lun*—“murmur,” “grumble,” “complain”—appears in our story about the lack of potable water in the Desert of Shur. The Israelites stopped at Mara, where the water was bitter; so, the “people grumbled against Moses” (*Exod. 15:24, NIV*). Unfortunately, *lun* became a key expression that marks Israel’s stories of wandering through the wilderness. It is a dominant word in the stories of manna and quail, where this negative term occurs eight times (as a verb in Exodus 16:2, 7, and 8; as a noun in Exodus 16:7, 8; and twice more in verses 9 and 12). It also is mentioned in the next account regarding water springing from the rock in the Rephidim narrative (*Exod. 17:3–6*). The same idea of murmuring or grumbling occurs in the book of Numbers (*Num. 14:2, 27, 29, 36; Num. 16:11, 41; Num. 17:5, 10*). This term is used outside of the Pentateuch only in Joshua 9:18.

When the people complained, Moses cried out to the Lord, which is now mentioned for the third time in Exodus (*Exod. 8:12, Exod. 14:15, Exod. 15:25*). The Lord directed Moses to throw into the bitter water a piece of wood. Thus, the water was healed when Moses followed God’s instructions. In the context of the water’s healing, the Lord promises that He will not bring upon them “‘any of the diseases [Hebrew: *mackalah*]’ ” He “‘brought on the Egyptians,’ ” if they will carefully listen and obey Him. To secure His promise, He uses a divine formula: “‘I am the LORD who heals you’ ” (*Exod. 15:26, NKJV*). The Lord refers to the various illnesses in connection with the ten plagues (see also God’s promise in *Exod. 23:25*). No such plague will fall on the faithful.

In the wilderness, water is a life-giving product. Without water, one cannot live; it is a source and sustainer of life. Water is life. One can survive without it for only a few days. No wonder we have several important stories and miracles related to water in Exodus and Numbers. Afterward, Israel encamped in Elim, where there was plenty of water and shade from the palms.

Quail, the Gift of Manna, and the Sabbath

The Lord mercifully responded to the grumbling of the people, who complained that they did not have meat and other food that they had enjoyed in Egypt. Their speech is full of exaggerations and bitter irony. The Israelites

recalled their full plates while slaving for Pharaoh. In response, however, the Lord promised that He would provide them with bread from heaven as well as quail. He said that in the evening they would have quail and in the morning bread from heaven. It happened precisely as predicted (*Exod. 16:13*). The surprise was in the morning, because they had never seen manna before, so they asked, “What is it?” (*Exod. 16:15*). This question is the meaning of the word “manna.”

With the gift of manna, God taught the Israelites how to observe and live the Sabbath. Jesus calls manna the “bread from heaven” (*John 6:31*), which is a reference to Exodus 16:4. Thus, manna was the bread the Lord gave His people to eat in the desert (*Exod. 16:15*). For 40 years, manna was provided for the Israelites (*Exod. 16:35*). The provision of manna ceased only when the Israelites celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land (*Josh. 5:10–12*).

Every week during the Israelites’ 40-year sojourn in the wilderness, four miracles occurred. These miracles taught the Israelites the sacredness of the Sabbath: (1) manna fell from heaven every day, except on Sabbath; (2) if someone collected manna for the next day during the workweek, the manna was spoiled by the following day; (3) manna fell in a double portion every Friday, the Sabbath’s preparation day; and (4) manna collected on Fridays did not spoil but stayed fresh for consumption on Sabbath. Thus, the Lord provided every day for Israel’s needs. Six days per week they needed to go out and collect manna, a reminder that every day they were completely dependent upon Him.

Another miracle with the bread from heaven was the Lord’s command to Moses to take an *omer* of manna, about 3.64 liters, put it into a jar, and then place it in front of the Testimony (*Exod. 16:34*). Later, the *omer* of manna was put into the ark of the covenant (*Heb. 9:4*) as a reminder to future generations. This manna did not spoil, even though the longest length for its staying unspoiled was only two days, from Friday to Sabbath.

The noun “Sabbath” (Hebrew: *shabbat*) several times is highlighted in the book of Exodus and mentioned for the first time in the Bible in Exodus 16:23, in which it is described as a “Sabbath rest” (Hebrew: *shabbaton*) and a “holy Sabbath to the LORD.” This verse is the first explicit command regarding Sabbath observance and contains three imperatives: “bake,” “boil,” and “lay aside” (*ESV*)! Sabbath should be celebrated. It is interesting that verse 25 adds the fourth imperative: “Eat”! Eat the manna today. Eating is closely tied to the observation of the Sabbath. The temporal term “today” is used three times in this text in connection with the Sabbath, thus emphasizing the miracle of eating manna on Sabbath because God provided it. In verse 25, it is stated that this is a “Sabbath to the LORD” (*NIV*), and verse 26 explains that the Sabbath is the seventh

day of the week. Verse 30 connects Sabbath to rest: “So the people rested [Hebrew: *shabat*] on the seventh day.” The triad of key words in this passage of Exodus 16:23–30—namely, “Sabbath,” “today,” and “rest”—ties in with Hebrews 4:7–10, in which Paul also elaborates on the ideas of “Sabbath,” “today,” and “rest.” The word “Sabbath” appears in the book of Exodus also in the following texts: in Exodus 16:25, 26, 29; Exodus 20:8, 10, 11; Exodus 31:14, 15 (twice), 16; and Exodus 35:2, 3.

In the apex of the manna story, when some people went out on Sabbath to gather manna, God asked a very pointed question:

“ ‘How long will you refuse to keep my commands’ ” (*Exod. 16:28, NIV*). The Lord uses the word “refuse” to describe their willful action. They needed to learn that the Sabbath was a gift, one that is reinforced by the fact that the Lord provided the food for them. Therefore, they did not need to collect manna for themselves on Sabbath.

Part III: Life Application

1. Jesus proclaimed about Himself that He is the Bread of Life (*John 6:35, 48*). How can we live with Jesus Christ in such a close relationship that He becomes for us our daily “bread and water”?

2. When, and how, should we attend to those who complain about the difficulties of life, and when should we not listen to murmuring?

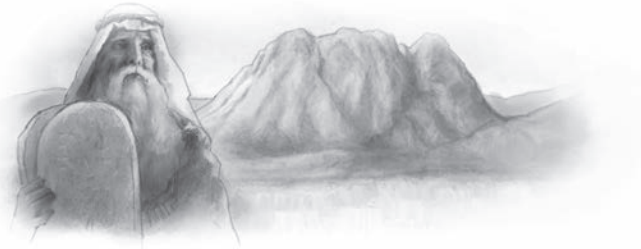
3. God was present in the pillar of cloud and in the pillar of fire, but the Israelites took His presence in the cloud for granted. We also

may have an outstanding work of God taking place among us and not appreciate it. How can we maintain our sense of awe for the sacredness of things related to God and His work?

4. Jethro's visit is a narrative par excellence about godly leadership. Moses was learning and growing in his leadership skills. He was a God-centered leader who acknowledged God's leadership in his life and for Israel. Moses also was an exceptional listener, who was filled with gratitude and praises for God. He was a visionary; yet, he needed to learn how to delegate responsibility. He was teachable even though he was a strong leader. What was it about Moses that enabled him to be open to new ideas and areas of improvement without taking constructive criticism personally or being threatened by suggestions for growth?

5. The apostle Paul, in reference to the miracle of the water flowing from the rock at Rephidim, states that Jesus was the Rock (*1 Cor. 10:4*). In that narrative, the people grumbled and put the Lord to the test (*Exod. 17:2*). In Malachi 3:10, we are invited to test God. What is the difference between the positive and negative testing of God? How can we test God in a wrong way?

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 5:6–21. 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 worshipping 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 19:4–6*

Study Focus: *Exod. 19:1–20:20*

Introduction: At Sinai, God establishes a covenant with His people. He is the Initiator of the contract. As the Initiator, God gives grace to His people and enters a relationship with them. God wants Israel to be His special people, His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Israel's success will rest on their positive response to God's loving guidance and to the mighty acts He performed on their behalf in Egypt and on the way to Sinai. God has already invited them to follow Him and proved that He plans to give them a bright future. If they only will keep His teachings and seek to cultivate a genuine relationship with Him, then God will be able to lead them in an unprecedented way to the Promised Land. They need to learn who He is and what He does for them in order to admire, love, obey, and worship Him. The gift of the Decalogue revealed the principles for a happy, balanced, and prosperous life.

Lesson Theme

By leading Israel out of Egypt and guiding them through the Red Sea and the wilderness to Mount Sinai, God desired to bring them to Himself (*Exod. 19:4*). For about a year, He taught them through this process. God was like a loving parent to His people, instructing them in what was best for their prosperity. The people saw how God defeated the Egyptian deities and cared for them through the plagues and their escape from Egypt. Then God gave them the most precious gift: the Decalogue, to teach them how to fear Him (*Exod. 20:20*). We reflect in this lesson on the different functions of God's law.

Part II: Commentary

The Decalogue forms the heart of God's revelation and biblical ethics and presupposes salvation. It is the Magna Carta of biblical teaching, and its summation, the norm of all norms. It forms the substance and foundation of divine standards for all humanity; its principles are eternal. The Pentateuchal account of the giving of the Decalogue underlines that it was announced by God (*Exod. 19:19; Exod. 20:1; Deut. 5:4, 5, 24*) and also written by Him (*Exod. 24:12, Exod. 31:18, Deut. 5:22*). It was given twice 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” (*Exod. 31:18, NKJV*) and “the words of the covenant” (*Exod. 34:28, NKJV*). The phrase “the Ten Commandments” is not used in the Hebrew, although they are referred to as being “commandments” in Exodus 20:6. Instead, the Decalogue is three times called “the Ten Words” (Hebrew: *‘aseret haddebarim*; see the Hebrew usage in *Exodus 34:28, Deut. 4:13, Deut. 10:4*).

In both Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Decalogue lies at the beginning of the law collections and their interpretation. There are two versions of the Decalogue, with very slight differences; the first one is recorded in Exodus 20:1–17 and the second one in Deuteronomy 5:6–21. The second version presented orally by Moses to Israel occurred almost forty years later, just before they entered the Promised Land (*Deut. 1:3, 4; Deut. 4:44–47*), where now he emphasizes the redemption given them in the Exodus. When Paul summarized the law as being love, he quotes from the Decalogue (*Rom. 13:8–10, Gal. 5:14*). Love is indeed the sum of God’s law because He is the God of love (*1 John 4:16*).

Even though particular laws of the Decalogue were already known in a nutshell before Sinai, God Himself chose to formally present the Decalogue to His people and to humanity. That’s because these commandments reflect, in a systematic way, who He is, His character, and His values.

The function of the law is not to teach us to gain salvation through its observance. That is, we should keep the law of God not in order to be saved but because we are saved. The law is not a source of life but instead is the means by which we manifest and express the life we have.

In the Bible, the law of God also is seen in a very positive light (*Matt. 5:16, 17; John 14:15; Gal. 3:21; 1 Cor. 7:19*). One may create poems on the law (such as Psalm 119, a masterpiece), sing about the law (*Psalms 19*), and meditate on it day and night (*Ps. 1:2, Josh. 1:8*) because it keeps one from evil and gives wisdom, understanding, health, prosperity, and peace (*Deut. 4:1–6, Proverbs 2, 3*).

The Decalogue has several crucial functions:

1. *God’s law is a warrant of freedom* (*Gen. 2:16, 17; James 2:12*). It is like a fence that creates a large free space for life and warns that beyond a specific point lies danger, problems, complications, and death. There is no future for those who step outside the circle of freedom.

2. *The law is a mirror* (*James 1:23–25*). In it, we can see how dirty we are and how much we need to be cleansed. The Decalogue reveals our sinfulness; however, it cannot purify us from sin or guilt (*Rom. 3:20*).

3. *God’s law is a signpost*. As such, it leads us as a *paidagogos*, or

schoolmaster, to Christ (*Gal. 3:24*). It points to Jesus, who cleanses, forgives our sins, and changes our lives (*2 Cor. 5:17, 1 John 1:7–9*).

4. *The Decalogue is God's promise to us.* By proclaiming these laws, God promises that these standards will be part of our lives if we maintain a close relationship with Him. He is the Guarantor who will enable these standards to become our permanent lifestyle. We will be so intimate with Him that we will not desire what is prohibited. We shall happily stay in fellowship with Him, asking Him to perform this obedience in us by the power of His grace, Word, and the Holy Spirit.

In the Decalogue, commandments four and five are given in the Hebrew language as positive commands in the form of the infinitive absolute that has two meanings in legal material: a command or an emphatic promise (see E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1910], pars. 113bb and 113ee). The other commandments are expressed as negative commands employing the negation particle *l'o* ("not"), plus jussive (like imperfect form). In addition to the fact that the meaning of such a Hebrew expression is a permanent prohibition, thus a commandment, it has been suggested that it also conveys a future situation, thus a promise (see Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993], p. 41). In light of this suggestion, a proper translation could be "you will not . . ." and not "you shall not. . ." Support for the understanding of the Decalogue as a promise may be found in Judges 6:23, wherein the Lord promises Gideon: "'You shall not die'" (*NKJV*). The grammatical construction in this sentence is exactly the same as in the Decalogue.

The Hebrew meaning of the term *dabar*, used to describe the Ten Commandments, does not necessarily mean "commandment" but "word" or "promise." It depends on the English versions, but see, for example, the use of the noun *dabar* as "promise," in 1 Kings 8:56; 2 Chronicles 1:9; Nehemiah 5:12, 13; and Psalm 105:42; and the uses of *dabar* as a verb, with the same meaning of "promising," in Deuteronomy 1:11, Deuteronomy 6:3, Deuteronomy 9:28, Joshua 9:21, Joshua 22:4, and Joshua 23:5.

Ellen G. White confirms our interpretation with the following statement regarding the function of the Decalogue: "The ten commandments . . . are ten promises."—Manuscript 41, 1896 [published in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1105]. "In every command or injunction that God gives there is a promise, the most positive, underlying the command."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 76. She stresses that "the voice of God from heaven" speaks "to the soul in promise, 'This do, and you will not come under the dominion and control of Satan.'"—Letter 89, 1898 [published in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1105].

The law's seeming restrictions are only for our good in order to maintain happiness and life (*Mic. 6:8, John 10:10*). The law is the norm of conduct for those who trust God and are saved by His grace through faith in Christ.

The place of the law in the new covenant is amazing—it is planted in the heart. The law is internalized (*see Matt. 5:21–48*) and should be seen not as a burden but as a joy. Those who live the Decalogue properly follow its promises with right motives, obeying its precepts out of gratitude and thankfulness for what God did, and is doing, for them. Grace does not change the law, but our attitude toward it does change. Paul is against legalism and against the misuse of God's law but not against the law itself (*Rom. 7:9–12*).

Jesus Christ is the *telos* of the law (*Rom. 10:4*), meaning He is its goal and purpose—not the end—in the sense of a termination or cessation of its validity. Christ is the hermeneutical key that unlocks the law's true meaning and purpose. Thus, it would be incorrect to state that Christ invalidated, terminated, superseded, or abrogated the law. Christ gives meaning to the law.

As Joshua reminded his audience, we are not able to obey God: “ ‘You are not able to serve the LORD’ ” (*Josh. 24:19, NIV*). However, when we ask God to take our weakness, He will make us strong. He will give us His Holy Spirit who will move us to obey Him (*Ezek. 36:27*). Paul says: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (*2 Cor. 12:10, ESV*). Obedience is the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Part III: Life Application

Ask your students the following questions:

1. **As humans, we can decide to do what is right only under the influence of God's grace. We need to decide to obey Him, but we have no power to fulfill our decision or to follow Him. We need help in our fragility and weakness, help from outside of ourselves. The good news is that He provides willingness (which is a response to His call of love) and power to obey (*Phil. 2:13*). In a practical sense, how do you see these provisions at work in your own lives?**

2. Whatever God commands, He enables His followers to do. Ellen G. White states that “all His biddings are enablings.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 333. From that perspective, the Ten Commandments are actually ten beatitudes. In what sense, and how, can God’s commandments enable believers to obey God?

Notes

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."

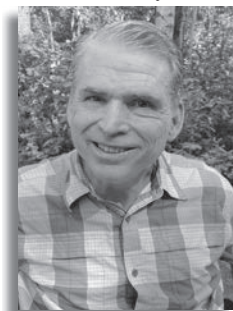
Carl stopped asking why. Instead, he asked God to use his stroke to win souls in Alaska. He wanted to be able to echo Joseph and say, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (*Gen. 50:20*).

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."

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 20:22–24*

Study Focus: *Exod. 20:21–23:33*

Introduction: In addition to the moral law (also known as the Decalogue, or God’s Ten Promises, which are traditionally called the Ten Commandments), the Lord also gave to Moses the *mishpatim*—literally judgments—also translated as ordinances, rules, laws, or regulations. These laws practically applied the principles of the Decalogue to the Israelites’ daily life. This section of laws, written on a scroll by Moses, was called “the Book of the Covenant” (*Exod. 24:7*), and this “Covenant Code” is enlarged upon in Exodus 20:22–23:19. Following is God’s sermonette on how, and upon what conditions, He will lead His people to the Promised Land (*Exod. 23:20–33*).

Lesson Themes

God is expanding and explaining the Ten Promises, or the Ten Words, to His people in the Covenant Code. This amplification of specific commandments can be directly detected in the following passages:

1. The first promise about the unique and living God is in Exodus 20:23a and Exodus 23:13.
2. The second promise about true worship and saying no to idols is in Exodus 20:23b; Exodus 22:20; and Exodus 23:24, 32b, 33.
3. The third promise about reverence to God and what He represents is in Exodus 22:28a.
4. The fourth promise about Sabbath rest is in Exodus 23:10–12.
5. The fifth promise about honoring parents is in Exodus 21:15, 17.
6. The sixth promise about respecting life is in Exodus 21:12–14, 23, 29.
7. The seventh promise about respecting marriage is in Exodus 22:16, 17.
8. The eighth promise about respecting property is in Exodus 22:1–4.
9. The ninth promise about respecting the reputations of people and the truth is in Exodus 22:11 and Exodus 23:1–9.
10. The tenth promise about respecting self by being pure in mind and not coveting permeates the entire Covenant Code.

These specific laws (casuistic or apodictic) reflect the Decalogue in the broader sense; for example, all prescriptions regarding injuries or harm point to the sixth promise, and regulations regarding theft to the eighth promise. The goal of these “judgments” is to help believers to be men and women of integrity.

Part II: Commentary

Exodus 19–24 deals with the establishment (*Exod. 19:3–8*) and renewal, or confirmation, of God’s covenant with His people in a solemn ceremony involving the sprinkling of blood, indicating the sealing of that covenant (*Exod. 24:3–8*). In between, like two bookends, are presented the foundational principles of God’s character in relation to humanity. These universal and eternal values, having no cultural or temporal limits, are expressed in the moral laws, the Decalogue or the Ten Promises (*Exod. 20:1–17*), and afterward explained in more detail in the Code of the Covenant (*Exod. 20:22–23:33*). The application and extension of the Decalogue in the form of the Covenant Code, for practical reasons, may be structured in the following way:

The Prologue (*Exod. 20:22–21:1*)

1. Cases involving Hebrew slaves (*Exod. 21:2–11*)
2. Cases involving death penalties (*Exod. 21:12–17*)
3. Cases involving personal injuries (*Exod. 21:18–32*)
4. Cases involving property damage, protection, and stealing (*Exod. 21:33–22:15*)
5. Cases involving life in society (*Exod. 22:16–31*)
6. Cases involving justice and neighborhood (*Exod. 23:1–9*)
7. Laws related to sacred seasons (*Exod. 23:10–19*)

The Epilogue (*Exod. 23:20–33*)

The principles behind these Covenant Code regulations may be applied even today; however, we must do so without implementing the penalties or punishments attached to them, because they were given for, and limited to, Israel’s theocratic system. Theocracy ended, together with the sacrificial laws, with the death of Jesus on the cross (*Dan. 9:25–27, Matt. 27:51, Col. 2:14*) and with the stoning of deacon Stephen, in A.D. 34 (*Acts 7:54–60*). Stephen’s death marked the end of the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27, fulfilling the Jews’ dispensation of time and marking the beginning of the gospel being proclaimed to the whole world, to both Jews and Gentiles (*Matt. 28:18–20, Acts 1:8*).

“Wherever I Cause My Name to Be Honored” (*Exod. 20:24, NIV*)

In the prologue to the Ten Commandments, which sets the tone for what follows, God declares: “I have talked with you from heaven [referring to the recent majestic, oral, and public pronouncement of the Ten Promises; see *Exod. 20:1; Deut. 5:24*]. . . . In all places where I record [Hebr. *zakar* “to remember”] my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee” (*Exod. 20:22–24*). This quadruple emphasis on the divine “I,” regarding what God did, and will do, is crucial. The grammatical form “ ‘I cause my name to be remembered’ ” (*Exod. 20:24, ESV*) has the Lord as its

subject only in this verse. The Lord Himself wants to assure His people that He will be with them. God promises that He will be present with them in the places where He establishes His name and causes it to be honored; there He will bless them.

These locations include numerous temporary places as well, and especially later the temple in Jerusalem, where He will be genuinely worshiped. The statement implies that people should respond properly and cultivate a relationship with Him. His presence and blessing are not automatic. He will be where His name will be remembered. This connects us with God's revelation of His name to Moses and, through him, to the Israelites by which He must "be remembered from generation to generation" (*Exod. 3:15, ISV*). Thus, in the theological center of the altar laws of Exodus 20:24–26, God's presence and blessing are underlined. God had already demonstrated that He was in the midst of Egypt, even though He was not acknowledged as such by the Egyptians (*Exod. 8:22*). But now He proclaims that He will be in the midst of Israel.

The Middle Verse of Exodus

According to the Masoretic marginal comments to the Hebrew text, the middle verse of the book of Exodus is Exodus 22:27. This verse focuses on one of the Lord's fundamental attributes, namely God's grace, which He gives freely and defines as unmerited favor offered to humans. The context speaks about God's care for the poor, and the reason is given: "For I am gracious." Notice that this is the Lord's only attribute in the whole of Scripture that is framed within the self-identification formula "I am." It is what He is: the Lord is gracious. This essential truth about God is mentioned four times in Exodus: twice as an adjective (*Exod. 22:27, Exod. 34:6*), and twice in verb form (*Exod. 33:19*). God's people should be as gracious as God is gracious, unselfishly helping those in need.

The Law of Retaliation (*Exod. 21:23–25*)

The so-called *lex talionis* (the law of retaliation) is often misunderstood and used to discredit God's character and the teachings of the Old Testament in an attempt to "prove" that the God of the Old Testament is a vengeful God. This notion is far from the truth and understanding of the meaning and intention of this law. The purpose was to limit personal retaliation or revenge, thereby deterring an individual or family from taking justice into their own hands. It was a humane law intended for judges dealing with different cases when injuries or harm had occurred. The law was to ensure the application of appropriate (not exaggerated) compensation. Financial recompense was primarily behind these regulations (*see, for example, Exod. 21:19, 22, 30, 32, 34–36*) or offers of freedom from slavery (*Exod. 21:26, 27*), so that the Israelite community would be protected and evil would be restricted.

The Conquest of Canaan

God assures the Israelites that just as He fought for them in the Red Sea experience (*Exod. 14:13, 14, 26–31*), He will do so again when they enter the Promised Land. He Himself will go ahead of them and defeat their enemies (*Exod. 23:20–31*). The divine “I” appears 13 times in the NIV translation of this passage, where God declares what He will do for Israel, enabling them to inherit the new territory: (1) “‘I am sending an angel ahead of you’ ” (*Exod. 23:20, NIV*); (2) “‘I will be an enemy to your enemies’ ” (*Exod. 23:22a, NIV*); (3) “‘[I] . . . will oppose those who oppose you’ ” (*Exod. 23:22b, NIV*); (4) “‘I will wipe them out’ ” (*Exod. 23:23, NIV*); (5) “‘I will take away sickness from among you’ ” (*Exod. 23:25, NIV*); (6) “‘I will give you a full life span’ ” (*Exod. 23:26, NIV*); (7) “‘I will send my terror ahead of you’ ” (*Exod. 23:27a, NIV*); (8) “‘I will . . . throw into confusion every nation you encounter’ ” (*Exod. 23:27b, NIV*); (9) “‘I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run’ ” (*Exod. 23:27c, NIV*); (10) “‘I will send the hornet ahead of you’ ” (*Exod. 23:28, NIV*); (11) “‘Little by little I will drive them out before you’ ” (*Exod. 23:30, NIV*); (12) “‘I will establish your borders’ ” (*Exod. 23:31a, NIV*); and (13) “‘I will give into your hands the people’ ” (*Exod. 23:31b, NIV*).

God also plainly states what His people need to do in response so that they may experience this divine blessing to its fullest: (1) “Pay attention” and “listen” (*Exod. 23:21, NIV*) to my Angel (this is the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Messenger, Jesus Christ (*see Gen. 16:7; Exod. 3:2, 4, 7; Exod. 14:19*); (2) “Do not rebel against him” (*Exod. 23:21, NIV*); (3) “Do not bow down before their [the pagans’] gods or worship them or follow their practices” (*Exod. 23:24, NIV*); (4) “You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces” (*Exod. 23:24, NIV*); (5) “Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods” (*Exod. 23:32, NIV*); (6) “Do not let them live in your land” for “they will cause you to sin against me” because their idolatrous worship “will certainly be a snare to you” (*Exod. 23:33, NIV*).

Thus, The Lord emphatically warns them not to enter into a covenant relationship with neighboring nations or follow their idolatrous practices by worshipping their gods. Such relationships and practices will disassociate the Israelites from their relationship with the living God, their Creator and Redeemer, causing their ruin.

Part III: Life Application

1. God’s original plan was that, at the sound of the ram’s horn, His people would “come up to the mountain” (*Exod. 19:13, ESV*). What

actually happened, and why did the Israelites miss this great invitation that God offered them (discuss with the class texts such as Exodus 19:16b; Exodus 20:19; and Deuteronomy 5:5, 25)?

2. On the basis of the story (*Exodus 19*), the Israelites were afraid when God spoke to them directly. What is the difference between a right fear and a wrong fear (*Exod. 20:19-21*)? What does the biblical teaching to “fear God” mean?

3. Why is it important that our vertical relationship with the Lord always be transmitted into the horizontal dimension of our work and care for people who need our help and respect?

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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 24:3*

Study Focus: *Exod. 24:1–31:18*

Introduction: The Lord saved His people from the power of Egypt, gave them freedom, brought them through the wilderness to Himself at Sinai, and established His covenant of love with them (*Exod. 19:3–6; Deut. 7:9, 12; Neh. 9:32*). His grace and care for His people were astounding. In a powerful display of His glory at Sinai, He spoke the Ten Promises (the gift of the Decalogue, pronounced in Exodus 20) and explained them in more detail in the Covenant Code (*Exod. 20:22–23:19*). Now the Lord ratifies this covenant with Israel in an important ceremony that is rooted in animal sacrifice, which points to Christ’s sacrifice, and is sealed with blood.

Part II: Commentary

The Ratification of the Covenant

The ratification of the covenant involved several important elements:

- Moses’ oral presentation of the Lord’s words and laws (*Exod. 24:3*);
- Moses’ writing of the Book of the Covenant (*Exod. 24:4a*);
- building an altar (*Exod. 24:4b*);
- setting up 12 stone pillars, representing the 12 tribes of Israel (*Exod. 24:4c*);
- burnt and peace offerings (*Exod. 24:5*);
- Moses’ sprinkling half of the sacrificial blood on the altar (*Exod. 24:6*);
- his reading of the Book of the Covenant (*Exod. 24:7a*);
- the people’s affirmative responses (*Exod. 24:3, 7b*);
- Moses’ sprinkling another half of the sacrificial blood on the people (*Exod. 24:8a*);
- Moses’ pronouncement: “ ‘This is the blood of the covenant [phrase occurring only here in the Hebrew Bible; *compare with Zech. 9:11, Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24*] that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’ ” (*Exod. 24:8b, NIV*);
- a covenantal meal, with 74 leaders, on Mount Sinai (*Exod. 24:9–11*).

In the setting of the covenant, God’s people responded three times in the same way to God’s gracious words: “ ‘We will do everything the LORD has said’ ” (*Exod. 19:8, NIV; see also Exod. 24:3, 7, NIV*). What was

wrong with such a promise? Namely, their self-confidence, their shallow understanding of the power of sin and of their own sinful nature, and their failure to acknowledge the need for God's assistance. In reality, just a few weeks later, many of them were dancing around the golden calf. The proper answer would be: "With the help of the Lord and by the power of His grace, we will do everything the Lord has said."

Joshua, a very faithful servant of Moses and later an excellent leader of God's people, personally heard these well-meant promises and knew how fragile, weak, and easily broken they were. Several times he witnessed the apostasy of the Israelites. When they again repeated at a later time, "'We too will serve the LORD'" (*Josh. 24:18, NIV*), Joshua decisively told them that they were "not able to serve the LORD" (*Josh. 24:19, NIV*) because their decision was not firm, as they still cherished some pagan idols (*see Josh. 24:14, 23*) and were not depending upon God's help but on their own strong will. However, Joshua personally declared: "'But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD'" (*Josh. 24:15, NIV*).

God invited Moses, along with Aaron and two of his sons, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 elders to meet with Him on Mount Sinai (*Exod. 24:9, 10*). By His close presence, God wished to reveal more fully who He was. It is purposely mentioned that they were eating and drinking on that occasion. It is not explained who prepared the banquet, although it most likely was the Lord Himself. Eating together was another form of sealing a covenant, so this was a covenantal meal. In biblical times, the very act of eating together established a deep friendship and a bond of family and brotherhood. If something was not right between those who shared a meal together, it was forgiven, and the promise was given by those feasting that they would stand by each other forever (*see, e.g., Jacob and Laban's meal, in Genesis 31:54*).

We experience a similar covenantal fellowship when we celebrate the life and death of Jesus during the Lord's Supper, the Communion. God is inviting believers to have a close relationship with Him and with one another by eating and drinking together. Those who participate in this commemorative ceremony form one family with Christ because it actualizes and makes tangible what He did for us. Communion is the time when His church is reestablished and a community of faith reformed, showing that He is their Lord, King, and Friend. Church members are united with Him and to one another. They are sanctified by His being with them. The bond is sealed by His presence and Word.

The Tabernacle of God

Almost one-third of the book of Exodus deals with the tabernacle, thus indicating its importance. Exodus 25 to 31 provides the detailed

blueprint, instructions about its design, and the materials used, while Exodus 35 to 40 narrate how to build it and the actual consecration of the sanctuary for its holy functions. What is the significance of this narrative?

The most important thing in the sanctuary is not the furniture, even though it cannot be overlooked because it set the stage for what was to take place in the tabernacle. The crucial thing is the drama, the actual play that takes place there.

It is like going to the theater to see a play with different scenes. What is on the stage tells the audience if the story will take place during the day or at midnight, if it is occurring in a town, palace, cemetery, or wedding banquet, who the main players are, and many details in between. The setting is important for understanding the plot and the play. In the same way, our focus related to the tabernacle must always be on the play itself, not just on the background, the furniture, and type of sacrifice, so that we may recognize what is being portrayed. We need to understand the meaning of all of it. The tabernacle is a monumental object lesson of God's plan of redemption.

The services in the sanctuary present the drama of God. In a dramatic way, they document who God is; what He stands for; the values He upholds; how He saves the repentant sinner; how He deals with sin and stubbornly wicked people; how He judges, and brings, a final solution to the problem of sin, so that one day evil will be eradicated. This drama demonstrates, ultimately, that peace, reconciliation, and harmony will be reestablished.

God wanted to dwell with His people. The tabernacle was His earthly dwelling place, not that He was not already with them, or could be contained by it, but because He wanted to demonstrate His actual tangible presence to His people, showing that they were not alone, abandoned, or forsaken, and that He was taking care of them.

The apostle Paul plainly states that the Lord does not live in temples made by human hands (*Acts 17:24, 25*), and Solomon solemnly declares, after building a marvelous temple for Him in Jerusalem, that even the heavens could not hold the Lord: " 'But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!' " (*2 Chron. 6:18, NIV*). Then Solomon continues: " 'May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. . . . Hear from heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive' " (*2 Chron. 6:20, 21, NIV*). God in His love and mercy condescends to our level and breaks into our time and space to be with us.

God's visible presence is behind His desire for Israel to build Him a tabernacle in the center of the camp. The Lord declares: " 'Have them

make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among [you]’ ” (*Exod. 25:8, NIV; see also ESV, NKJV*). Do not overlook the conjunction “and” in this phrase (good translations have “and,” not a causative “that,” even though it is also a proper translation), for this “and” is exegetically and theologically crucial. God did not need the sanctuary in order to be, or dwell, with His people. His presence was with them all the time, as the principal theme of the book of Exodus is God’s presence with His people. However, God later uses the Hebrew preposition *lamed* (“so that” or “that”) in Exodus 29:46b, so everyone will be clear that the purpose of the sanctuary is for Him to closely dwell with His people and demonstrate His visible presence (*Exod. 29:42–46*).

When Israel’s glorious Solomonic temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the people were sent into exile as a result of their unfaithfulness (*Dan. 9:4–20*), God through the prophet Ezekiel assured His people that He would be “a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone” (*Ezek. 11:16, NIV*).

God tells Moses that he must build the sanctuary, according to the model of the heavenly sanctuary shown him on Mount Sinai (*Exod. 25:9, 40; see more on this in the Commentary section of lesson 13*). The most important space in the sanctuary was the Most Holy Place, with its central piece being the ark of the covenant, also called the ark of the testimony (*Exod. 25:16*), because God’s words of the testimony or the Decalogue were to be placed inside the ark (*Exod. 40:20*). On the top of the ark, an atonement cover made of pure gold was placed, a mercy seat (Hebrew *Kaporet*, from the root *kapar*, “atone”; in the Greek, *hilasterion*). It was the place where final reconciliation took place and the confessed sins of God’s people were blotted out. Here God provided the ultimate solution to the problem of sin and evil (*see Lev. 16:15, 16, 30*). Jesus Christ is the *hilasterion*, the mercy seat, the atoning Sacrifice who atones and purifies us from our sins (*Rom. 3:25, CJB; 1 John 2:2, NIV*).

Part III: Life Application

1. After Solomon built the temple, God said to him: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (*2 Chron. 7:14*). How can we carefully implement and practice as a community of faith this divine advice? What hinders our prayers, keeping God from hearing, and responding to, our cries for help?

2. How do we renew the covenant of love with the Lord during Communion? Do we need a special ceremony to do so? Explain.

3. Jesus Christ “became flesh and dwelt among us” (*John 1:14, ESV*). In the Greek language, it is literally stated that He “tabernacled with us.” How can the incarnation of Jesus and His life on earth assure you that He is with you and understands all your troubles, problems, and life’s challenges?

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 worshipping 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 32:31, 32*

Study Focus: *Exod. 32:1–35*

Introduction: When Israel apostatized, Moses was with the Lord on Mount Sinai. The people threatened his brother, Aaron, with death, so Aaron yielded to them and made an idol. The people then declared:

“ ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’ ” (*Exod. 32:4, NKJV*), thus explicitly rejecting the Lord as their God and breaking their covenant with Him. It is significant to note that the Lord stated to Moses before his descent to the camp from Mount Sinai that the Israelites had turned away from Him and worshiped an idol. Thus, Israel was now Moses’ people, and it was Moses who had delivered the Israelites from Egypt. The Lord said: “ ‘Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt’ ” (*Exod. 32:7, NIV*). Previously, the Lord, as well as Moses and Jethro, had stressed that it was the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt (*Exod. 3:8, 17; Exod. 12:17, 51; Exod. 13:3, 9, 14, 16, 18; Exod. 16:6, 32; Exod. 18:1, 10; Exod. 19:4; Exod. 20:2*). God now doesn’t identify with Israel because the Israelites did not recognize Him as their Lord. What a tragic situation!

Afterward, the Lord offers to make Moses “ ‘into a great nation’ ” (*Exod. 32:10, NIV*). It was a powerful temptation for Moses to accept the offer and become great. But he demonstrates the nobility of his character by not even considering such an offer. His unselfish interest in the people’s prosperity stood firm; no personal ambitions could alter it. Moses intercedes for Israel and appeals to the Lord by pointing out that it was God who delivered Israel. This people are “ ‘your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand’ ” (*Exod. 32:11, NIV*). Because of Moses’ intervention, the Lord “relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened” (*Exod. 32:14, NIV*). What power there is in intercessory prayer!

After Moses returned to the camp and saw the rebellion, he broke into pieces the two tablets containing the Ten Promises God had given him, an act that was the external sign of what the Israelites had done when they rejected the Lord as their Leader. Then Moses destroyed the golden calf. Even in Moses’ presence, people were running “wild” and “out of control” (*Exod. 32:25, NIV*), so he had to intervene. Those who stubbornly continued in rebellion had to be purged, so God, through Moses, commanded them to be killed. This elimination was necessary; otherwise, God’s people would have gone into irreversible ruin (regarding this execution, read Ellen G. White’s *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 324–327). The next

day, Moses again climbed Mount Sinai and interceded for Israel, requesting their merciful God to forgive His people for their wicked behavior.

Part II: Commentary

The Golden Calf Apostasy and Aaron

Aaron could have prevented the golden calf apostasy if he had stood firm for God and His truth. He should not have yielded to the people's demands for a visible god or gods. When disrespect was shown for God and His servant Moses, Aaron should immediately have stopped the uprising. Instead, he listened to the rebels and made a false proposition. In the time of Moses' absence, Aaron should have functioned as a strong leader, not fearing even his own death. God always intervenes to defend His cause, and Aaron should have trusted Him.

Moses' concern for the prosperity of God's people is reflected in his question to his brother Aaron: "And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" (*Exod. 32:21*). Aaron's yielding to wrong requests led to tragic consequences. To excuse his behavior, Aaron invented a miracle: "And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf" (*Exod. 32:24*). Aaron referred to magic to calm Moses' anger. Sin blinds, and stories are often created to cover disobedience.

"And the LORD was very angry with Aaron" (*Deut. 9:20*), but his life was spared because Moses interceded for him. Aaron sincerely repented of this grievous sin, was restored to his leadership position, and later was anointed as the high priest (*Exod. 40:12–15*). God's grace and mercy are amazing!

Intercessory Prayer

There are four basic kinds, or types, of prayer. First, there is the "prayer of praise" or "prayer of thanksgiving," wherein we thank God for the marvelous things He has done. In the prayer of thanksgiving, we express our gratitude for who God is and for what He does in our lives and the lives of His people, thus praising Him with joy for His numerous blessings. Second, there is the "prayer of repentance," wherein we humbly ask God for forgiveness for our sins. Third, there is the "prayer of supplication," wherein we pray for specific things for ourselves, such as wisdom, the Holy Spirit, joy, love, health, peace, patience, spiritual gifts, financial resources, food, safety, protection, and so on. Finally, there is the "prayer of intercession," wherein we pray not for ourselves but for others, requesting for God to mercifully intervene and give them special "blessings" or "needed things," such as guidance, conversion, children, parents, marriage,

family, communities, institutions, prosperity, success, and so on. We also may pray for the sick, persecuted, hurt, poor, students, colleagues, baptisms, supervisors, government, and so forth. Moses' prayer was an intercessory prayer for sinners, given that he prayed for those who erred, petitioning God to forgive their sin and not to abandon His people (*Exod. 32:31, 32*).

Important as they are, intercessory prayers are surrounded by mystery. On the one hand, God will do the maximum for every person or people to save them because He loves them. On the other hand, intercessory prayer allows God to do more for people in their given situation. This is a tension, and we are not able to resolve it now. The good news is that we do not need to do so. Thus, we do not need to know precisely how intercessory prayer functions, but God's Word testifies that it works, and our experience confirms it. What we need is to pray as an obedient response to His instructions. We do not need to understand every puzzle in life in order to pray! We need to accept God's lead, trust Him, follow, and pray.

God respects people's choices because God never forces anyone to follow Him. He guarantees their freedom; yet, we are encouraged to pray for people, even for our enemies. This is another apparent contradiction that we are unable to solve or explain because we do not see behind the veil, where a spiritual battle is taking place. One can but dimly understand it when reflecting upon it in the context of the great controversy, as we observe the spiritual warfare between the forces of good and evil, truth and lie, light and darkness, Christ and Satan. These glimpses of insight help us to trust that our Lord will do His best to save everyone.

Behind the curtain of the unseen world exist rules that regulate how the powers of good and evil interact. Theologians speak about God "permitting" Satan to act. John Peckham calls these regulations "rules of engagement." (See Peckham, *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018], p. 58.) The devil is permitted to act, and he has real power, although restricted, under these "rules of engagement" (*see Job 1, Job 2:6*). These rules have been decided upon, with input from the heavenly council (representatives of all heavenly beings), Satan, and God. These regulations mean that God has given Satan certain "privileges," or better yet, "permissions," to fully demonstrate what his "reign" would look like, allowing everyone to compare the two sides.

These regulations also mean that God does not always get what He desires (*Isa. 30:15, 18; Isa. 66:4; Ezek. 18:23; Matt. 7:21; Matt. 18:14; Matt. 23:37; Luke 7:30*). Moreover, God also is restricted in His actions. God cannot act against these "rules of engagement" because He keeps His promises. "A genuine love relationship requires the possibility that creatures might reject God's ideal will."—Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*,

p. 139. God will not restrict our freedom to choose one side or the other because it would prevent the full blossoming of love between God and His created creatures. We are unable to solve this apparent contradiction because we do not see behind the veil of this spiritual battle. However, God is committed “to the flourishing of love and the covenantal rules of engagement.”—*Theodicy of Love*, p. 140.

We do know several things about God, but some things are ambiguous or puzzling to us. Paul states that “our knowledge is partial and incomplete,” and “we see things imperfectly” (*1 Cor. 13:9, 12, NLT*). We know that God loves us, saves us, and wants to save everyone. We know that we can trust Him and rely upon His promises, care, and help. We know that He wants our best. We know that He hears our prayers and that we cannot manipulate Him. We know that prayers are important, and Satan trembles when God’s people pray because things move forward when we pray. We do not understand why some prayers are quickly answered, others with delay, and some never, at least according to our expectations.

God invites us to pray, not because we understand what is going on behind the scenes or how our prayers are heard. We do not control prayer, but we are invited to pray, even commanded to do so. When God’s people pray, the evil kingdom is shattered, and God’s cause can mysteriously advance.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. How is it that we humans have such a short memory of the great things God has done for us? How easily we forget! How can we refresh our walk with God and remember in critical moments of our life the goodness of God so that we may make right decisions and not sin against Him?**

- 2. What can be a golden calf in our lives?**

3. How can we be more vigilant toward, and helpful to, people who need our prayers? Prayer opens us up to God so that He can do for us, and in us, miracles of transformation.

4. Moses prayed for sinners and offered his life for them. This is a pattern of how we should pray for those who have sinned in our midst. Discuss with your class different situations and how we can pray for each other in such cases.

5. Christ's intercessory prayer for His disciples and for us is a model of how to pray for others (*read John 17*). Moses did not need to die so that sinners could experience forgiveness. In the case of Jesus, our true Intercessor, His death was necessary for us. Why?

6. How can we pray for one another without being offensive or disrespectful?

“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:

- ❶ “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?
- ❷ Exodus 34:6, 7 is rightly called the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. Why?
- ❸ 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?
- ❹ 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 34:6, 7*

Study Focus: *Exod. 33:1–34:35*

Introduction: God commands Israel to depart from Mount Sinai and go to the land that He had promised to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (*Exod. 33:1*). After almost a year’s stay at Sinai (*Exod. 19:1, Num. 10:11*), the Israelites need to go forward and continue their journey to the Promised Land. During their stay at Sinai, God made a covenant with them and desired to bring them to Himself. He gave them the Decalogue and many additional instructions on how to be a wise, just, kind, disciplined, and well-organized nation (*Deut. 4:5–10*). It is now time to move ahead. However, God declares: “ ‘I will not go with you’ ” (*Exod. 33:3, NIV*). This pronouncement was because of Israel’s golden calf apostasy. God’s holy presence in the midst of Israel was incompatible with the people’s stubborn disobedience and would cause their destruction.

When the people heard this devastating news, they mourned and “stripped off their ornaments” (*Exod. 33:6, NIV*). Some translations render this verse correctly, showing that the removal of their ornaments was not something done only upon that occasion but was now permanent: “Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward” (*Exod. 33:6, ESV; see also NASB or NLT*). Once again, Moses pleaded with the Lord, beseeching Him to be with them, to guide them, to go with them. And furthermore: “ ‘if your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here’ ” (*Exod. 33:15, NIV*). God responded and assured Moses that He would lead them: “ ‘I will do the very thing you have asked’ ” (*Exod. 33:17, NIV*).

Part II: Commentary

The self-revelation of God’s character to Moses is the theological heart of the book of Exodus (*Exod. 34:6, 7*). It is situated at the apex of Moses’ climb up the mountain of God to meet with Him in a special way. God revealed His character to Moses upon his last climb recorded in the Pentateuch, which was at least his seventh climb. This last climb was also the third time that Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights with his Lord. Moses was growing in his relationship with the Lord; so, God was able to give him a fuller revelation about Himself and who He was. Besides these climbs, Moses interacted with the Lord in the “tent of meeting,” which

was located outside of the camp of Israel (this tent is not the tabernacle, which will be built later and put in the center of the camp). The biblical text underlines that, during this time, a friendship developed between the Lord and Moses and that the Lord communicated directly with him “face to face” (*Exod. 33:11*).

The expression “face to face” does not mean that Moses literally saw the face of God (*Exod. 33:20*) but that they were very dear friends. This phrase is an idiomatic expression that means intimate closeness. This meaning is clear from the situation described in Deuteronomy 5:4, wherein Moses, in his sermon, reminds the Israelites that the Lord spoke directly to them in near proximity: “ ‘The LORD talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire’ ” (*Deut. 5:4, NKJV*). In spite of God’s closeness to them, the people, unfortunately, stayed at a relational distance from their Lord.

God’s Glory

Four themes are of utmost importance in the book of Exodus: (1) God’s presence; (2) God’s salvation/deliverance; (3) God’s guidance; and (4) God’s glory. The last theme is particularly developed in Exodus 33 and Exodus 34.

On one occasion, Moses realized that he did not know the Lord as he should, so he asked Him: “ ‘If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you’ ” (*Exod. 33:13, NIV*). He humbly desired to know God better; so, he boldly requested: “ ‘Show me your glory’ ” (*Exod. 33:18, NIV*). God kindly responded to Moses that He would show him His goodness (*Exod. 33:19*). This divine response reveals that God’s glory is His goodness. Later we learn that when Moses is with the Lord on Mount Sinai, God reveals to him His character (*Exod. 34:6, 7*). In other words, God’s glory is His character, and the Lord’s goodness is a summary of God’s character.

The phrase “found favor/pleased” (literally, “finding grace”) is a key expression in this passage (*Exod. 33:12–17*). It appears here five times (*Exod. 33:12, 13, twice; Exod. 33:16, 17; and also in Exod. 34:9*). The previous use in Exodus of the term “favor/grace” was that the Israelites would find “favor” with the Egyptians because the Lord would “give” them “favor in the sight of the Egyptians” by giving them gold, silver, and clothing at the time of their departure from Egypt (*Exod. 3:21, Exod. 11:3, Exod. 12:36, NKJV*). The use of our passage is theological, especially in view of Exodus 34:6, in which it is explained that God is “gracious” (i.e., giving grace, or favor one does not deserve). Moses is humbly asking for God’s grace, a favorable response.

God previously explained to Moses who He was when Moses asked about the meaning of His name. Moses listened to God’s explanation of its

meaning, namely, that (1) He is present; (2) He is eternal; (3) He is the God of history; and (4) He is active in behalf of His people (*Exod. 3:14–16*). Moses already knew God from his many interactions with Him: his time with Him in Midian, miracles performed before Pharaoh, the wonders of the ten plagues and the opening of the Red Sea, God's care for His people in the wilderness, hearing God speak from Sinai, and so forth. Now Moses wants to understand Him better. He is ready to receive a deeper revelation of Him. God can give us insights into His character and about truth only to the extent that we are able to understand. Moses grew in His walk with God; so, God could reveal to him much more about Himself.

Early in the morning, Moses climbed the mountain. He had to take two stone tablets, which he had to personally chisel because he had broken the original tablets (*Exod. 34:1*). This was a slight rebuke to Moses for what he had done without God's permission, but God graciously again wrote the Ten Promises on the new tablets. The Lord came to Moses in the cloud, which is a form of theophany. Clouds are symbols of God's presence (*Num. 11:25; Deut. 33:26, NIV; Dan. 7:13*).

The Lord declared who He was in a self-disclosing way. He is the Lord, a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abundant in love and faithfulness, showing love to thousands of generations, forgiving, and just. But the last portion of this self-revelation of God puzzles many: " 'He does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children . . . to the third and fourth generation' " (*Exod. 34:7b, NIV*). Why would God punish people to the third and fourth generation? This verse echoes the description from the second promise of the Ten Commandments that the Lord is " 'visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments' " (*Exod. 20:5, 6, ESV*).

To understand this concept, one needs to take into consideration the following facts: (1) God is using participles (i.e., continuous actions) when describing the next generation, which means they continue in the same wicked ways as their fathers (the previous generation) and have similar behavior and attitudes: they are "hating" the Lord and are thus "guilty." On the other hand, note that God blesses those who are "loving" and "keeping" His commandments. (2) Consider the contrast of God's mercy: punishment to the third and fourth generation of the wicked but giving love to thousands of generations. (3) Three to four generations often lived together, so within the same household, wrong attitudes were shared from one generation to the next. The prophet Ezekiel perfectly explains and corrects the misunderstanding of God's punishments in families from one generation to another. (*See Ezekiel 18.*)

When Moses descended from Mount Sinai, his face radiantly reflected

God's glory. However, he did not know that his face was shining. People who are shining do not know that they are. The closer we are to the Lord, the more keenly we see our imperfection in the light of God's holiness, and the more we want Him to transform us into His image so that we can reflect the beauty of His character.

It was not God's presence alone that brought the change in Moses' life. It was important for Moses to come into His presence, but, again, that was not enough. It was crucial that Moses be open to God's love, grace, and compassion. Moses' understanding of God's goodness (*Rom. 2:4; Rom. 12:1, 2*) and his opening up to its transformative power made his face shine.

When the apostle Paul reflects on the shining face of Moses, he stresses that the glory of Jesus surpasses that of Moses. Christ with His teachings can be engraved into our character when we fix our eyes on Him. By beholding Him and by the power of the Spirit of God, we will gradually reflect His likeness (*2 Cor. 3:18*).

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Part of the eternal gospel is the divine imperative to “give glory” to God (*Rev. 14:7*). God is glorious enough, so we cannot add anything to His glory. What does it mean to give glory to Him when we understand that His glory is His character?**

- 2. Jesus told His disciples that they were “the light of the world” and encouraged them to let “your light shine” (*Matt. 5:14, 16*). He identifies this light with our good works for others. How do our good deeds help people glorify the heavenly Father?**

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3. We know that there is cold and warm light around us. Warm light is given to us by shining light bulbs, fire, and sunshine. What kind of light are we to people around us? How can we bring the warm light of God's love into all our interpersonal relationships?

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4. Moses conversed with God very openly. How can we today have candid conversations with God? How can we clearly hear what He tells us? How can we be sure, in the plethora of many voices, that it is His voice speaking to us?

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5. Friends are people who trust each other and can share everything with each other. Their secrets will never be revealed. Friends help each other in time of need. In times of crisis, they support each other. True friends never betray each other. Jesus said to His followers: "You are My friends" (*John 15:14, 15, NKJV*). How can we cultivate our friendship with God?

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:

- ① 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?
- ② 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?
- ③ 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.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 40:34, 38*

Study Focus: *Exod. 35:1–40:38*

Introduction: Before the Israelites began to work on the tabernacle, specific teachings and reminders were delivered regarding the keeping of the Sabbath (*Exod. 35:1–3*). Even while working on the sanctuary, people needed to respect and celebrate “a Sabbath of rest to the Lord” (*Exod. 35:2, NKJV*).

God gave Moses a blueprint of the tabernacle, also called the tent of meeting, with instructions on how to construct it (*Exodus 25–31*). Now the time arrived to actually build it. All material for the tabernacle was first collected (*Exod. 35:4–29, Exod. 36:4–7*), then craftspeople (*including women, see Exod. 35:25, 26*) were endowed with the Spirit of God to work on the sanctuary skillfully and artistically (*Exod. 35:30–36:4*), and the construction began. If diligent work on various garments is included, then, altogether, ten major items had to be prepared:

- the tabernacle (*Exod. 36:8–38*),
- the ark (*Exod. 37:1–9*),
- the table (*Exod. 37:10–16*),
- the lampstand (*Exod. 37:17–24*),
- the altar of incense (*Exod. 37:25–28*),
- the anointing oil and incense (*Exod. 37:29*),
- the altar of burnt offering (*Exod. 38:1–7*),
- basin for washing (*Exod. 38:8*),
- the courtyard (*Exod. 38:9–20*),
- the priestly garments, the ephod, the breastplate, and other priestly clothing (*Exod. 39:1–31*).

In Exodus 38:21–31, the material used is enumerated (more than 1 ton of gold, about 3.75 tons of silver, and about 2.5 tons of bronze). Moses inspected all the work on the tabernacle and found that it was done “just as the LORD had commanded” (this phrase is repeated three times to emphasize precision and obedience; *Exod. 39:32, 42, 43*). Moses was very pleased with the accomplished work, and he blessed all the workers (*Exod. 39:43b*).

Afterward, the tabernacle was to be set up on the first day of the first month, according to God’s instruction (*Exod. 40:1, 2*), which meant that it was erected almost one year after the Israelites departed from Egypt (*Exod. 12:2, 6; Exod. 40:17*). When the big tent was ready, particular items were assembled and placed within and without, starting with the Most Holy Place and ending with the courtyard. Every space was divided

by a curtain (three different curtains are mentioned: in Exodus 40:3, 5, 8; and, again, in Exodus 40:21, 28, 33).

Part II: Commentary

God's Presence

God's presence means everything to believers. His name "I AM WHO I AM" or "I will be who I will be" means that He is the eternal, all-present God. When God Himself explains the meaning of His name, His presence is emphasized (*Exod. 3:13–15*).

The principal theme of this Exodus section related to the tabernacle is God's presence. The Lord asked them to build it, because He wanted to be tangibly with His people, to dwell among them in their very center. God wanted to be close to them so they could see His *shekinah* glory. The Israelites were guided by His presence in the visible form of the cloud during the day. This same cloud turned into a fiery pillar at night. When the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, the Israelites moved (*Exod. 40:36–38*). If God should abandon the Israelites, they would be doomed to failure, destruction, and death.

The culminating point in the construction of the tabernacle was the fact that "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (stated twice for emphasis; *Exod. 40:34, 35*), thus, filling the space with the cloud, a visible sign of God's presence. The tabernacle, filled with God's glory, is a very fitting climax and conclusion to the book of Exodus (*Exod. 40:34, 35*). This should help people to cultivate God's presence in their own lives.

God already had previously demonstrated His presence in the midst of the land of Egypt (*Exod. 8:20–23, NIV*). He had led the Israelites out of Egypt (*Exod. 12:51*) and rescued them at the Red Sea (*Exod. 14:30, 31*). The Lord provided manna (*Exod. 16:14, 15*) and, through the Sabbath, taught them that He is their Creator, who was with them. Sabbath is nothing more than "God with us" (*Gen. 2:2, 3*), and He promises His people He will be with them wherever His name is remembered (*Exod. 20:24, ESV*). God's saving presence is a guiding presence because, through various interventions, God helped Israel grow by His relational, and transforming, presence.

Filled With the Spirit of God

God not only provided the blueprint for the tabernacle and asked the Israelites to build a sanctuary, but He "filled" people with the Spirit of God (*Exod. 31:3, Exod. 35:31*), who enabled them to construct it (*Exod. 31:1–11, Exod. 35:30–36:1*). What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? The biblical text provides a clear answer: the people were filled

with wisdom and knowledge and were endowed with skills, abilities, and artistic capacities to do all kinds of crafts and designs with precious metals, stone, wood, and fabric in the building of the sanctuary. Thus, nothing magical or mysterious happened. No spirits or powers entered a person; only the Holy Spirit gave spiritual gifts, skills, or artistic abilities, enabling the advancement of God's work of proclaiming His truth and mission. In the time of Moses, this endowment happened to Bezalel, Oholiab, and other craftspeople. When the Spirit of the Lord fills people, He enables them to do new things for His cause.

The same is true when "the Spirit of God came upon" a person. Such a phrase is mentioned in the Bible for the first time in the case of Balaam (*Num. 24:2*), which means that the Holy Spirit gave him a special revelation, and he was able to prophesy. In the book of Judges, the sentence "the Spirit of the LORD came upon" is used seven times for different judges (Othniel [*Judg. 3:10*], Gideon [*Judg. 6:34*], Jephthah [*Judg. 11:29*], and Samson [*Judg. 13:24, 25; Judg. 14:5, 6, 19; Judg. 15:14*]), empowering them to care, protect, and perform God's work. A similar meaning is contained in the phrase regarding being baptized with the Holy Spirit (*Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16*) or receiving the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:38*).

The Earthly and Heavenly Sanctuary

The Lord commanded Moses to build a sanctuary, according to the pattern (Hebrew: *tabnit*; *Exod. 25:9*) or plan (Hebrew: *mishpat* means literal judgment; *Exod. 26:30*) that He showed him on Mount Sinai. This pattern was a miniature representation of the heavenly sanctuary, adapted to our human situation and condition but modeled after the heavenly original (*Heb. 8:1, 2*).

The earthly sanctuary is not constructed according to the heavenly sanctuary on a 1:1 scale. The apostle Paul helps us to understand the vast difference between the heavenly and earthly sanctuaries. He argues that the priests "serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven" (*Heb. 8:5, NIV*) and explains that it was only a shadow of the heavenly reality. This illustration is very fitting.

Let's make a comparison between a person and his or her shadow. A person's shadow is as real as he or she is; however, the shadow is a very poor reflection of the man or woman. One can know very little about the person based on his or her shadow. The appearance of his or her shadow will depend on the position of the sun. Best-case scenario, one's shadow may allow an observer to guess if the person is male or female, tall or short, fat or slim, and to speculate about other external characteristics. A person's shadow will not reveal to the observer the person's age or the expressions on his or her face. The shadow will say nothing about a person's thinking, emotions, goals, knowledge, work, position, dreams,

plans, or disappointments. It is sufficient to demonstrate by this example that we need to be careful not to make the heavenly sanctuary fit into our limited thinking, knowledge, and experience.

The original heavenly temple is incomparable in measures, space, and materials. The heavenly sanctuary temple is a place where God resides; it is a palace with His throne (*Jer. 17:12*). It is a place of assembly and worship for the universe (*Isa. 14:13*). It is the heavenly command center from which His judgments are issued (*Ps. 11:4, 5; Ps. 18:6; Ps. 57:3; Ps. 76:8; Ps. 102:19; Ps. 123:1*). As God is real, angels are real, heaven is real, and so is the heavenly sanctuary.

The rituals of the earthly sanctuary present a very important aspect of salvation by demonstrating how God saves and deals with sin and sinners. The earthly sanctuary reflects the main functions related to the plan of salvation. There were daily services that provided an individual believer forgiveness and assurance of salvation. The yearly services pictured the final and objective solution to the problem of sin: evil will be no more and will be totally eradicated. As a result, God's character of love, truth, and justice is uplifted, vindicated, and affirmed by the entire universe because He has openly revealed and demonstrated His love. All creatures will recognize His glory, sovereignty, and power. He is worthy of every being's praise for His goodness and justice, and every person will bow before Him in total admiration (*Phil. 2:9, 10; Rev. 15:4*). Everyone without any exception will proclaim that God is love.

Part III: Life Application

1. Does God stress any prerequisites or conditions that must be fulfilled prior to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit? Pay careful attention to Peter's statement in his sermon at Pentecost: " 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' " (*Acts 2:38, ESV*). What does this promise mean to you?

2. Many are praying for the Holy Spirit in order to possess it or have it for themselves. In reality, the Holy Spirit needs to possess us so that He may use us. He equips us for service. Remember that every believer has at least one spiritual gift to serve others. What is the gift you received from God? What spiritual gifts do you need so that you may be more useful to God, His church, and society at large?

3. How can we cultivate God's presence in our lives? What activities can hinder, or take, the joy of His presence from us?

4. Why is it so important to eradicate sin and evil from our earth in order to restore the original harmony? Would it be possible to control evil if God did not eliminate it but allowed its existence in perpetuity? Explain. If evil is self-destructive, how long would it exist without God's intervention to destroy it?

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.