

## 1. Adam and Eve: The Intended Ideal

**Biblical material:** Gen. 1:26, 2:18–3:16.

### Quotes

- According to this account the promise of the devil was fulfilled to the very letter, Adam and Eve did not die, and they did become as gods, knowing good and evil. *Robert Green Ingersoll*
- It all goes back, of course, to Adam and Eve—a story which shows among other things, that if you make a woman out of a man, you are bound to get into trouble. *Carol Gilligan*
- I think I've learned exactly how the fall of man occurred in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, and Adam said one day, "Wow, Eve, here we are, at one with nature, at one with God, we'll never age, we'll never die, and all our dreams come true the instant that we have them." And Eve said, "Yeah... it's just not enough is it?" *Bill Hicks*
- Adam and Eve had an ideal marriage. He didn't have to hear all about the men she could've married, and she didn't have to hear all about the dishes his mother cooked. . *Unknown*
- Hard-headed woman and a soft-hearted man/ They've been causing trouble since it all began. *Deep Purple, "Speed King"*

### Questions

Can we over-idealize the experience of Adam and Eve? How would you respond to the charge that this is a myth? To what extent does the failure of Adam and Eve limit the positive lessons we can draw? What is significant in the fact that they were not put to death for their sin? How does God look in the story? How does this fit into the larger great controversy picture?

### Discussion/Comment

How could two different persons both be made in the image of God, and why is God described in the plural? Already at the beginning there are some intriguing insights into the nature and character of God! That fact that the original couple both reflect elements of God illustrates the complimentary nature of man and woman that together reveals the image of God.

That the fall did not bring a sentence of execution from God is a most essential concept in understanding the problem of sin and evil. We are not dealing with an imposed penalty here, but rather the sad and inevitable consequence of a failure of trust. Such a perspective is vital in understanding how God sets about restoring the relationship and resolving the problem.

It also reminds us that "angelic perfection failed in heaven; human perfection failed on earth." Perfection is no guarantee of sinlessness, and poses a troubling question as to the origin of sin. Yet if we could explain sin, that would be in some way to excuse it. Sin is truly "insane," in that it makes no sense, yet is always a possibility in a universe created with choice.

The immediate effects of choosing to believe Satan, the God-accuser, is seen in Adam blaming Eve, and Eve blaming the serpent. The lack of personal responsibility, a victim mentality, and the transference of guilt to others are a direct consequence of making an alternate reality that always accompanies evil. The distortion of truth that comes from a refusal to trust is a powerful lesson we must learn in the great controversy. That this immediately affected the relationship between human beings and God is no surprise, but we see that it also compromised

the trusting, intimate relationship between Adam and Eve, and that the next generation harbored a murderer. Perhaps more than an intended ideal, the story of Adam and Eve is the prototype of the dysfunctional couple that has issues with identifying reality and personal responsibility amid the mutual recriminations.

After the creation of Adam, Eve's special creation out of Adam was clearly intended by God to show the mutuality of existence and oneness. The "one flesh" is the reason for the specialness of the marriage relationship, that each finds in the other complementarity and fulfillment. This original intent of God has been much distorted, and the arguments continue today over power and control. Yet there is nothing in the Genesis account that shows anything but mutually respectful equality in the beginning. Certainly there is no hint of precedence or the imposition of a dictatorial male regime. That this has all too often been human experience is more to do with the effects of sin than of God's plan, and warns us against institutionalizing such concepts. Adam and Eve in their sinless state show us the way it still should be, with mutual respect and support, and love for God with his principles reigning supreme.

This Genesis account also reveals that human beings are made "in the image of God," and that God said "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..." The "plural" nature of God so identified is intriguing, as well as what it really means to be in God's image/likeness. That we have characteristics of God should invite our interest, since in what way is this true? Perhaps the most important aspect is the valuing of truth and right—that the principles God holds dear are those we should too. Only as we live "in truth," not holding to lies and distorted views of reality, only as we agree with God that right is fundamentally right and cannot be "re-defined," only then are we truly children of God. This is the image that we have lost, and the image into which we are being remade.

### **Ellen White Comments**

God Himself gave Adam a companion. He provided "an help meet for him"--a helper corresponding to him--one who was fitted to be his companion, and who could be one with him in love and sympathy. Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation. "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it." Ephesians 5:29. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one." {PP 46}

When Adam and Eve listened to the voice of the tempter, they sinned against God. The light, the garments of heavenly innocence, departed from these deceived souls, and they drew about themselves the dark robes of ignorance of God. The clear and perfect light of innocence which had hitherto surrounded them had lightened everything which they approached; but deprived of that heavenly light, the posterity of Adam could no longer perfectly trace the character of God in his created works.

After the fall, the things of nature could not fully teach the lesson of the great and marvelous love of God. Therefore the Father sent his well-beloved Son into the world, and declared him to be a perfect revelation of himself to man. In order that the world might not remain in darkness, in eternal, spiritual night, the God of nature met in Jesus Christ. He was "that true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." {GCDB, March 6, 1899}

## 2. Abraham and Sarah: Faith Tested and Tried

**Biblical material:** Gen. 12:2; 16:1-5; 22; James 2:20-26.

### Quotes:

- If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them... For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited. *C.S. Lewis*
- Abraham and Sarah had waited 25 years for an heir, and God had finally blessed them with Isaac. But it's more than the long wait. It's that Isaac is the *evidence* of God's promise to Abraham. *Ben Edgington*
- That's a brutal, cruel, heartless variety of "mercy" - God ordering a human sacrifice, and then "mercifully" backing out on it. If such a God existed, I would be morally compelled to try to destroy it. *wxtornado*

### Questions

How would you characterize the relationship between Abraham and Sarah? In what ways was their "faith tested and tried"? What does this say about God? If Abraham had argued with God over the sacrifice of Isaac as he did over the destruction of Sodom, how would God have responded? What of Moses' refusal to obey God and step aside so Israel could be destroyed?

### Discussion/ Comment

Abraham as God's friend surely trusted his loving Lord, yet the account reveals defects in his relationship with God. Of course, that is not to demean Abraham—for who of us would have exhibited such trust as Abraham did at many times in his life. Yet even so, and wanting to make sure that God was seen by others to be faithful, both Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands rather than trusting in God.

As we consider the evidence presented in their case we see both high points of confidence in God, and yet also all-too-human decisions to take matters into their own hands. In accepting the call to leave home and travel to the Promised Land, a total trust in the promises of God is clear. And yet, twice on the journey, Abraham "half-lies" that Sarah is his sister, fearing he will be killed so that others can gain his beautiful wife. Why if God had provided so much evidence of his continuing care should Abraham have doubted? A question that applies to us...

Similarly why should we be so surprised that *both* Abraham and Sarah laughed when told Sarah would conceive and bear a son in her old age? Logically it made no sense in terms of practicalities, and it would be so easy to rationalize that God surely meant something different. The attempt to "fix" things for God by arranging a surrogate mother in the form of Hagar does indicate a misguided desire to make sure God is not mistaken. In our humanity we all too often fail to place complete confidence in God, trying to make things work out our own way.

The story of the sacrifice of Isaac is often cited as a wonderful example of blind faith. But let's consider the whole situation. After hearing the command of God, one wonders what kind of conversation Abraham had with Sarah, if any! How would you explain that?!

Think also of the implications. This is the son that God specifically promised, and the one miraculously provided. So why would God command his murder? Is it because, as some have

suggested, that Abraham needed to realize that God knows best and had to be implicitly obeyed? Consider also that human sacrifice was practiced at that time by the pagan peoples. So why would a believer in the true God give credibility to the practice? Would not others point to this action and consider that this God was just the same as theirs? What would it say about God and his reputation? Remember Moses who refused to stand out of the way and allow God to destroy Israel and make a new nation. His argument—God it would ruin your reputation. So why didn't Abraham argue the same way?

Abraham clearly had much time to debate with God on the three-day journey to Mount Moriah. The record in Genesis gives the bare record of the events, and does not give us Abraham's reflections. But the same man who argued with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would surely have argued over the heathen human sacrifice of his son, the son God promised and provided.

That he came to settled resolution and trusting confidence is indicated in the seeming calmness of his words to his son—that God would provide the lamb. And the best insight comes from the New Testament, where Hebrews records that, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." (11:17-19 NIV).

Finally we see God, not trying to prove anything to himself, but providing the opportunity to Abraham to reveal his total trust and confidence in God to himself Not only for Abraham's benefit, but also for all those who watch with intense interest to know what kind of God Abraham believed in. A God of complete trustworthiness, who works with each of us, despite our repeated attempts to do things on our own...

### **Ellen White Comments**

If Abraham and Sarah had waited in confiding faith for the fulfillment of the promise that they should have a son, much unhappiness would have been avoided. They believed that it would be just as God had promised, but could not believe that Sarah, in her old age, would have a son. Sarah suggested a plan whereby she thought the promise of God could be fulfilled. She entreated Abraham to take Hagar as his wife. In this they both lacked faith, and a perfect trust in the power of God. By yielding to the advice of Sarah, and taking Hagar as his wife, Abraham failed to endure the test of his faith in God's unlimited power, and brought upon himself, and upon Sarah, much unhappiness. {ST, March 27, 1879}

If you become restless, as did Abraham and Sarah, and work up plans of your own in order to bring about God's promises, a condition of things which you deem desirable after your own ways and ideas, you will find that it will result in sorrow, misery, and sin. {2MR 336-7}

Abraham knew that true dignity, true elevation is to be found only in those who love and fear God. There is a debasement upon the entire character of the godless, who follow the imagination of their own hearts, and are filled with their own devices. But those who make God their trust, who are elevated by his grace, obedient to his requirements, seeking his glory, fearing his displeasure, will receive his blessing. They will have that hope and courage, that dignity, calmness, and self-possession, which only those can have who are connected with God. Abraham had maintained an habitual trust in God. {ST, April 10, 1879}

### 3. Isaac and Rebekah: Rearing Rivals

**Biblical material:** Gen. 26-28.

#### Quotes

- We must love one another, yes, yes, that's all true enough, but nothing says we have to like each other. It may be the very recognition of all men as our brothers that accounts for the sibling rivalry, and even enmity, we have toward so many of them. *Peter de Vries*
- If you avoid rivalry and dispute, God will protect you. *Sri Sathya Sai Baba*
- The rivalry is with oneself. I try to be better than is possible. I fight against myself, not against the other. *Luciano Pavarotti*
- The petty man is eager to make boasts, yet desires that others should believe in him. He enthusiastically engages in deception, yet wants others to have affection for him. He conducts himself like an animal, yet wants others to think well of him. *Xun Zi*

#### Questions

How is it that Isaac repeats the exact sin of his father Abraham in claiming his wife is his sister? Is it true that the only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn anything from history? To what extent are the parents responsible for the rivalry between Jacob and Esau? What of God's predictions as to what would happen? How does God look in this story?

#### Discussion/Comment

One key verse is not in this week's biblical material: Genesis 25:28—Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. While sibling rivalry is not uncommon, the choice of favorites by parents compounds the matter. The sad tale of "rearing rivals" reveals not only the personalities of the brothers in conflict, but also those of the parents. The arrival of twins was problematic enough in a society that gave precedence to the firstborn son, and wise parents would have surely tried to find a way to defuse the sense of injustice that could be felt by the secondborn. Yet it appears that Isaac was only too pleased with his wild hunter son, while Rebekah favored the quieter home-boy Joseph.

Isaac was not a man that enjoyed confrontation. In his dealings with Abimelech of Gerar, Isaac followed his father Abraham in identifying his wife as his sister. When the locals caused problems over wells, he just moved on until they pursued him no longer. And later, when Abimelech came to make a treaty, saying they had never mistreated Isaac, Isaac did not complain but agreed to the treaty.

Nor did he seem to complain about Esau's choice of wives from the Hittite people, even though the record notes they were a source of grief to Rebekah and Isaac. In fact it is Rebekah who complains later to Isaac that she does not want Jacob marrying a local woman.

Rebekah's choice to deceive Isaac by representing Jacob as Esau may have been motivated by favoritism of a son she felt was unfairly treated by the system. She may have even argued to herself that she was just fulfilling God's predictions that he had made clear from the birth of the two brothers. Nevertheless her plan, that Jacob follows, was foolish, for it only served to enrage Esau and confirm him in his antagonism. From that time on the family was irrevocably divided, and never were they ever together again.

Some interesting insights revealed in the account: 1. Rebekah tells Jacob to do as she tells him, and when he worries about being cursed instead of blessed, she calls for any curse to come upon her. How tragically that statement came true! 2. When Isaac asks Jacob how he managed to hunt so quickly, Jacob replies that “the Lord *your* God gave me success.” It seems faith has not been transmitted across the generations. 3. Jacob’s threefold lie—he claims he is Esau, he claims to have had hunting success, and he repeats again he is Esau in direct response to Isaac’s precise question.

Jacob reveals that he is quite willing to use deceit and misrepresentation for his own good. Yet neither Rebekah or Jacob seem to have thought through the consequences, which tear apart the family, and lead to Jacob being “expelled” to save his life from his murder-talking brother. Jacob lives the life of the exile, and Rebekah never sees him again.

At home, the situation was surely terrible. Rebekah is distraught that Jacob has had to leave. Esau is furious at the deception practiced by Rebekah and Jacob. And Isaac lives out the rest of his days as the dupe. The only change is Esau’s attempt to ingratiate himself with his father by marrying an “acceptable” wife—with whom he lives along with his first two “heathen” wives!

Jacob begins the long journey—not only traveling far away, but also the long road to God whom he encounters at Bethel. Though it is a long process, and a hard road, Jacob starts to learn.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Esau took two idolatrous wives, which was a great grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Notwithstanding this, Isaac loved Esau better than Jacob. And when he thought that he was about to die, he requested Esau to prepare him meat, that he might bless him before he died. Esau did not tell his father that he had sold his birthright to Jacob, and confirmed it with an oath. Rebekah heard the words of Isaac, and she remembered the words of the Lord, “The elder shall serve the younger,” and she knew that Esau had lightly regarded his birthright and sold it to Jacob. She persuaded Jacob to deceive his father, and by fraud receive the blessing of his father, which she thought could not be obtained in any other way. Jacob was at first unwilling to practice this deception, but finally consented to his mother’s plans.

Rebekah was acquainted with Isaac’s partiality for Esau, and was satisfied that reasoning would not change his purpose. Instead of trusting in God, the disposer of events, she manifested her lack of faith by persuading Jacob to deceive his father. Jacob’s course in this was not approved by God. Rebekah and Jacob should have waited for God to bring about his own purposes, in his own way, and in his own time, instead of trying to bring about the foretold events by the aid of deception. If Esau had received the blessing of his father, which was bestowed upon the first-born, his prosperity could have come from God alone; and he would have blessed him with prosperity, or brought upon him adversity, according to his course of action. If he should love and reverence God, like righteous Abel, he would be accepted and blessed of God. If like wicked Cain he had no respect for God, nor for his commandments, but followed his own corrupt course, he would not receive a blessing from God, but would be rejected of God, as was Cain. If Jacob’s course should be righteous, if he should love and fear God, he would be blessed of God, and the prospering hand of God would be with him, even if he did not obtain the blessings and privileges generally bestowed upon the first-born. {1SP 107.1}

Rebekah repented in bitterness for the wrong counsel which she gave to Jacob, for it was the means of separating him from her forever. He was compelled to flee for his life from the wrath of Esau, and his mother never saw his face again. {1SP 106-7}

#### 4. Jacob and Rachel: Labor of Love

**Biblical material:** Gen. 29-31:16

#### Quotes:

- All the scheming and plotting in the world won't result in something lasting, transcendent. *Jose Saramago*
- Women are natural guerrillas. Scheming, we nestle into the enemy's bed, avoiding open warfare, watching the options, playing the odds. *Sally Kempton*
- It seems to me that there are two kinds of trickery: the "fronts" people assume before one another's eyes, and the "front" a writer puts on the face of reality. *Françoise Sagan*
- The craftiest trickery are too short and ragged a cloak to cover a bad heart. *Johann Kaspar Lavater*

#### Questions

How comes the schemer Jacob is the one who is "schemed" by his uncle Laban? How is the story of Jacob an example of "natural consequence"? What does Jacob's continuing commitment say about his love for Rachel? What do we learn about the nature of deception in contrast to the truthfulness of God? What comfort can we gain from the story of Jacob?

#### Discussion/ Comment

"Even amid all this deceit, trickery, passion, jealousy, favoritism, and on and on, the Lord was there, working out His plan despite human foibles. At the same time, how much better this story could have been had people loved God first and one another as themselves." (Wednesday's lesson.) How do you react to this statement? How do you see the balance between individual responsibility and dependence on God?

The fact the cheater himself gets cheated seems to be poetic justice of a kind. It might almost seem that in order to learn the hard way about the damage caused by deception, Jacob has to experience being deceived firsthand. Some may even suggest that this was inherent in God's plan. But we do not need to blame God for Laban's actions. It seems that this society, like many others, "valued" sharp dealing. In the same way that Jacob exploited Isaac's love for Esau, Laban exploited Jacob's love for Rachel.

The deception is worse for being family. Laban welcomes Jacob as his "own flesh and blood" and then proceeds to exploit him—twice. One wonders what kind of tensions built up within the extended family, especially after the switching of Leah for Rachel. And how would Jacob have treated Leah, knowing that she had colluded in the deception?

Then begins the child-bearing competition, with all the compounded tragedies. Something of Leah's agony is expressed in her naming of her son Reuben, "because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." Genesis 29:32 NIV. She knows Jacob really loves her sister Rachel... Certainly a real Old Testament soap-opera!

Rachel then becomes jealous of her sister, and argues with Jacob. Once again, the mistake of Sarah is repeated, and Rachel seeks to have children through her servant-girl. The web becomes even more tangled, as servant-girl-concubine-surrogate mother bears a son. Notice how Rachel names surrogate son number two: "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I

have won.” Genesis 30:7 NIV. Hardly happy families, is it? Even down to the two women haggling using plants to decide who sleeps with Jacob. Leah tells Jacob, “You must sleep with me. I have hired you...”

In all of this, God is credited with opening and closing wombs, with hearing and remembering the women in their mutual distress. So what was God *really* doing, and how does this apply to us? What does this tell us about how families should operate, and how we should relate to God? Does he play procreation games, or is even God trying to do the best in very less than ideal circumstances? In this tawdry story of human sinfulness we simply see ourselves, and the results of our sinful natures. While we may be appalled at the situation we see here, we recognize our own loves are not very different. Instead of complicating things, we need to come back to God’s principles, and live in harmony with the best that God desires for all of us.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Seven years of faithful service Jacob gave for Rachel, and the years that he served “seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.” But the selfish and grasping Laban, desiring to retain so valuable a helper, practiced a cruel deception in substituting Leah for Rachel. The fact that Leah herself was a party to the cheat, caused Jacob to feel that he could not love her. His indignant rebuke to Laban was met with the offer of Rachel for another seven years’ service. But the father insisted that Leah should not be discarded, since this would bring disgrace upon the family. Jacob was thus placed in a most painful and trying position; he finally decided to retain Leah and marry Rachel. Rachel was ever the one best loved; but his preference for her excited envy and jealousy, and his life was embittered by the rivalry between the sister-wives. {PP 189-90}

From the hour when he received the birthright, Jacob was weighed down with self-condemnation. He had sinned against his father, his brother, his own soul, and against God. In one short hour he had made work for a lifelong repentance. This scene was vivid before him in afteryears, when the wicked course of his sons oppressed his soul. {PP 180}}

Though Jacob had left Padan-aram in obedience to the divine direction, it was not without many misgivings that he retraced the road which he had trodden as a fugitive twenty years before. His sin in the deception of his father was ever before him. He knew that his long exile was the direct result of that sin, and he pondered over these things day and night, the reproaches of an accusing conscience making his journey very sad. As the hills of his native land appeared before him in the distance, the heart of the patriarch was deeply moved. All the past rose vividly before him. With the memory of his sin came also the thought of God’s favor toward him, and the promises of divine help and guidance. {PP 195}

Jacob had sinned, and had deeply suffered. Many years of toil, care, and sorrow had been his since the day when his great sin caused him to flee from his father’s tents. A homeless fugitive, separated from his mother, whom he never saw again; laboring seven years for her whom he loved, only to be basely cheated; toiling twenty years in the service of a covetous and grasping kinsman; seeing his wealth increasing, and sons rising around him, but finding little joy in the contentious and divided household; distressed by his daughter’s shame, by her brothers’ revenge, by the death of Rachel, by the unnatural crime of Reuben, by Judah’s sin, by the cruel deception and malice practiced toward Joseph--how long and dark is the catalogue of evils spread out to view! Again and again he had reaped the fruit of that first wrong deed. Over and over he saw repeated among his sons the sins of which he himself had been guilty. But bitter as

had been the discipline, it had accomplished its work. The chastening, though grievous, had yielded “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” Hebrews 12:11. {PP 237-8}

## **5. Moses and Zipporah: Relating with Relations**

**Biblical material:** Exodus 2–4, 18:1-27, Num. 12:1-4.

### **Quotes:**

- Unless one pretends to be stupid and deaf, it is difficult to be a mother-in-law or father-in-law. *Chinese proverb*
- In each family a story is playing itself out, and each family’s story embodies its hope and despair. *Auguste Napier*
- Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. *Leo Tolstoy*, opening line from *Anna Karenina*
- To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right. *Confucius*
- It isn’t necessary to have relatives in Kansas City in order to be unhappy. *Groucho Marx*

### **Questions**

Why did God allow Moses to marry a foreigner? What was the role of Reuel (meaning friend of God)-Jethro? What can we infer of the relationship between Moses and Zipporah? What is the significance of the “bridegroom of blood”? What of the reaction of Miriam and Aaron to Moses’ wife? How does Moses relate to his in-laws? What of the picture of God here?

### **Discussion/ Comment**

The Biblical record simply states that Reuel gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. There is no mention of a love match. Moses calls his first son Gersom, reflecting his sense of being an alien in a foreign land (one wonders what Zipporah thought of that!).

Then Moses follows the command of the Lord to return to Egypt, so Zipporah and their sons have to ride on donkeys to a foreign land, leaving behind friends and family. Again, what was she thinking about?

Next we read, “At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son’s foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it. ‘Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,’ she said. So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said “bridegroom of blood,” referring to circumcision.)” Exodus 4:24-26 NIV.

What’s going on? Clearly we are missing some of the context here! The circumcision requirement was surely known by Moses, following God’s command to Abraham. Perhaps Moses had not thought it necessary in a foreign country, or possibly Zipporah objected. But as a sign of being one of God’s people it was surely important. Maybe we see here some family tensions?

Again in Exodus 18 we wonder what is going on since at some stage Moses had sent his family back to his father-in-law. Now Reuel/Jethro, the priest of Midian (meaning what exactly?) gives Moses good advice, which Moses accepts. Once again we are missing much of the family dynamics here.

And when Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses’ wife, since she is a “foreigner,” we see problems again in the wider family. Sadly we do not know much about what was happening,

how Moses' wife was operating, but on the basis of the Lord's response, it seems that the accusations against Moses and his wife were unjustified. Yet once more we see the all-too-human elements in what should have been a very godly family.

We struggle some to understand God in this family context that is fraught with "emergency measures." Moses leading God's fractious people surely did not help the home situation, and we hear nothing of what was going on. We also hear that at some stage Moses sent his wife and children back to their maternal home. We can only guess at what was going on. Yet one thing is sure—God worked through all involved, even the "foreigners." Zipporah saved Moses' life. Jethro gave Moses divinely-inspired advice. And God did not tolerate discrimination against Moses' wife, even though this marriage did not follow the principle of not marrying foreigners.

There are many lessons to look for here. Surely the most important is that God works through all of us in our individual ways, and that we each have a role to play in furthering God's kingdom. While we in reality know little of the relationship between Moses and Zipporah, we may infer that she did not cause great problems for her leader husband, and that she may well have been a wise and helpful confidant. From what we do know, she honored Moses and cared for him, even though some of the rituals (like circumcision) perhaps seemed repulsive. Like her father, Zipporah is one of the unsung heroes. Certainly God can use foreigners too!

### **Ellen White Comments**

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; yielding to the persuasion of his wife, 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. {PP 255-6}

Though called a "Cushite woman" (Numbers 12:1, R.V.), the wife of Moses was a Midianite, and thus a descendant of Abraham. In personal appearance she differed from the Hebrews in being of a somewhat darker complexion. Though not an Israelite, Zipporah was a worshiper of the true God. She was of a timid, retiring disposition, gentle and affectionate, and greatly distressed at the sight of suffering; and it was for this reason that Moses, when on the way to Egypt, had consented to her return to Midian. He desired to spare her the pain of witnessing the judgments that were to fall on the Egyptians.

When Zipporah rejoined her husband in the wilderness, she saw that his burdens were wearing away his strength, and she made known her fears to Jethro, who suggested measures for his relief. Here was the chief reason for Miriam's antipathy to Zipporah. Smarting under the supposed neglect shown to herself and Aaron, she regarded the wife of Moses as the cause, concluding that her influence had prevented him from taking them into his counsels as formerly. Had Aaron stood up firmly for the right, he might have checked the evil; but instead of showing

Miriam the sinfulness of her conduct, he sympathized with her, listened to her words of complaint, and thus came to share her jealousy. {PP 383-4}

## **6. Samson and His Women: The Folly of Passion**

**Biblical material:** Judges 14-16.

### **Quotes:**

Seduced, shaggy Samson snored.  
She scissored short. Sorely shorn,  
Soon shackled slave, Samson sighed.  
Silently scheming,  
Sightlessly seeking  
Some savage, spectacular suicide.  
*Stanislas Lem*

### **Questions**

Why would God want to act through Samson—what are the dangers here? Are we to take from this story just the usual lessons of avoiding seductive women, or is there more to it? How could Samson’s story have ended up differently? Was Samson’s strength in his “magic hair”? How can God validate such violence? What kind of God is represented here?

### **Discussion/ Comment**

The story begins with Samson choosing a wife from the enemy—the Philistines. His parents are appalled, and try to talk him out of it. But the Biblical record observes, “His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.” Judges 14:4 NIV. Already a difficult verse in a book full of difficult verses. Because in the time of the Judges all were doing what was right in their own eyes, it’s hard to see what really is right!

Whatever the case, certainly Samson’s choice of wife brought nothing but trouble—for all. In the first confrontation with the Philistines, Samson poses the riddle—which his wife persuades him to share with her and then informs her countrymen. Hardly surprising when they threaten to burn her and her father to death. (Note in passing—that is exactly what happens to her and her father later, Judges 15:6).

Samson’s passionate life, full of fighting and lust, is a conflicted tale. Surely the context and societal circumstance explain some, yet it is hard to read some of the commentary that, “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men...” Judges 14:19 NIV. In fact every time the “Spirit of the Lord’ comes upon Samson, he carries out violence...

The climax of the story is with Delilah, though his role as leader of the Israelites for twenty years must not be forgotten. (And what this man of God was doing with a prostitute in Gaza is best left unexamined!).

It seems almost inconceivable that after repeated betrayals Samson should continue to be with Delilah. She had made her loyalties very clear—they were to her people, the Philistines, and not to Samson. But Judges 16:4 makes it clear he had fallen in love with her. (So that makes it OK, right? No—this is a good illustration that we do not, should not, simply follow our feelings. We may have our feelings, but we are not required to act on them).

Samson seems to think he can go on playing with fire and not get burned. Delilah complains that Samson is making a fool out of her by lying about the source of his great strength. Why does he not respond that she should not be trying to betray him to the enemy? After such repeated evidence, why didn't he just leave? The reply must be that he became so sure of his own strength, and his own ability to outwit his foes, that he went along with her little game. Only to discover that this was no little game, and that by truly betraying his God through the casual negation of his Nazirite vow, he ended up as a blinded slave.

Notice in the story how the Philistines worked through Delilah. She must have known what happened to Samson's wife. And she clearly demonstrated no true love to Samson. So what was he thinking? How was he representing God to those around him? And even at the end, what was achieved by his murderous suicide, except more hatred, bitterness, and suffering? It is a sad episode for a people who knew the true God, but did not witness rightly.

And God? Weeping for foolish Samson, with all his misused power. For his people, led by an intemperant strongman easily distracted by pretty women. For the Philistines too, who did not receive a good picture of the true God, and who mourned their dead at the hands of this foolish "man of God."

### **Ellen White Comments**

The town of Zorah being near the country of the Philistines, Samson came to mingle with them on friendly terms. Thus in his youth intimacies sprang up, the influence of which darkened his whole life. A young woman dwelling in the Philistine town of Timnath engaged Samson's affections, and he determined to make her his wife. To his God-fearing parents, who endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose, his only answer was, "She pleaseth me well." The parents at last yielded to his wishes, and the marriage took place...

God's promise that through Samson He would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" was fulfilled; but how dark and terrible the record of that life which might have been a praise to God and a glory to the nation! Had Samson been true to his divine calling, the purpose of God could have been accomplished in his honor and exaltation. But he yielded to temptation and proved untrue to his trust, and his mission was fulfilled in defeat, bondage, and death...

The Israelites made Samson judge, and he ruled Israel for twenty years. But one wrong step prepares the way for another. . . . He continued to seek those sensuous pleasures that were luring him to ruin. "He loved a woman in the valley of Sorek," not far from his own birthplace. Her name was Delilah, "the consumer." . . . The Philistines kept a vigilant watch over the movements of their enemy, and when he degraded himself by this new attachment, they determined, through Delilah, to accomplish his ruin...

Three times Samson had the clearest evidence that the Philistines had leagued with his charmer to destroy him; but when her purpose failed, she treated the matter as a jest, and he blindly banished fear...

Samson's infatuation seems almost incredible. At first he was not so wholly enthralled as to reveal the secret; but he had deliberately walked into the net of the betrayer of souls, and its meshes were drawing close about him at every step...

God had borne long with him; but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, the Lord departed from him. There was no virtue in his long hair merely, but it was a token of his loyalty to God; and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited. {CC 131-4}

## 7. Ruth and Boaz: Firm Foundations

### Biblical material: Ruth 1-4

#### Quotes

- A man who doesn't trust himself can never really trust anyone else. *Cardinal de Retz*
- You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you don't trust enough. *Frank Crane*
- To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved. *George Macdonald*
- You can't shake hands with a clenched fist. *Indira Gandhi*
- A good marriage is at least 80 percent good luck in finding the right person at the right time. The rest is trust. *Nanette Newman*

#### Questions

Why is this story included that seems to sanction the marriage between an Israelite and a Moabite? What of the past history? If counsel were given to this couple, what would it be? What is the basis for this relationship? Despite the cultural difference between then and now, how is this a model for marriage? What message is God conveying by placing this book in his Word?

#### Discussion/Comment

Instead of depicting an ideal marriage between an Israelite man and woman, one of Scripture's best representations of a trusting marriage relationship is between one of God's people and a "heathen" woman. God had specifically excluded Moabites from the congregation of Israel: "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation." Deut. 23:3 NIV. (One wonders whether Ruth was aware of this prohibition before declaring loyalty to Naomi's people and God!)

While the culture and legal system is clearly very different to today, what shines through is the commitment of Ruth and Boaz to doing what is right. Ruth's dedication to her mother-in-law is commendable, as is Boaz' sense of responsibility. Throughout the story, and despite the difficulties faced on both sides, the recognition of each other as having dignity and value makes a seemingly impossible relationship actually succeed.

Many questions arise. What attracted Ruth to Naomi's people and God, when her sister-in-law eventually decided it would be better to stay in Moab. As Naomi makes clear, the hope for a better life is by remaining in the culture and place that is known. Orpah would have a much greater chance of remarriage if she remained in Moab. Ruth is venturing into the unknown, unsure of where she is headed or what kind of treatment she will receive in Israel.

Desperately poor, Ruth is left no option but to glean in the fields. One step above a beggar, she was vulnerable to mistreatment. But the "chance" meeting with Boaz proves the turning point. Notice how each preserves the proprieties of the day. Ruth admits her situation, and seeks no special attention. Boaz acts honorably and charitably. When Naomi suggests to Ruth a night meeting with Boaz, they both know the potential for disaster. But Boaz, no doubt surprised, still maintains his principles. He is even careful not to promise too much, because he is not the closest relative to be the kinsman-redeemer. But he will do all he can. And by acting wisely, there is the happy ending...

...to a very strange story. One wonders how those that read responded. Once again, like the book of Jonah, the expectations are turned upside-down. This is not a marriage that is supposed to happen. Boaz would have been expected to consider a Moabite widow as beneath him. Naomi had no expectations that her plan would work, since it went well beyond what could have been expected. And Ruth, in her new country, with all the differences in customs, culture, and religion, does not play the role of a victim, but of a strong person who will act honorably and not take any easy way out. Her confident discussion with Boaz reflects a woman who does not feel herself disadvantaged despite her circumstance, and willing to do what was necessary to secure a future for both Naomi and herself.

Ruth asks Boaz, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” Ruth 2:10 NIV. The answer is beyond the human, though there is no doubt of the attraction here! The whole story is a parable of grace and redemption, for all concerned. One of the few “happy ending” stories, and a long way removed from the dysfunctional relationships so frequently observed in Scripture, the essential ingredients transcend the letter of the law and even divinely-given prescriptions. Because Ruth and Boaz operate from high principles and demonstrate they can be trusted even in the most challenging situations, God can endorse their relationship since it vividly reveals the true foundations of his kingdom. God is vindicated by those who demonstrate trust and trustworthiness.

A historical footnote that the concluding verses of Ruth makes clear is that Boaz is the grandfather of King David. So Ruth the Moabitess enters into the blood-line of Jesus himself... In fact the ancestors of Jesus make for interesting reading, and demonstrate a gracious acceptance by God of some characters that we might well challenge. Even in his lineage God in Christ is making a statement...

### **Ellen White Comments**

The Bible is a revelation of the divine will and purpose of God. Those who follow its teachings are doers of the words of Christ, and by this means they bring solid timbers into their character building. Let us heed the words of inspiration, which exhort us to “be pitiful, be courteous.” Boaz represented the character of the Christian gentleman. Like Abraham, he commanded his household after him to keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment. He showed courtesy to all his servants, and as he passed among his workmen in the field, he said unto the reapers, “The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee.” Here is a lesson for both masters and servants, for employers and the employed. The servants are strengthened in their hearts to do righteously, to be faithful to masters who manifest respectful kindness and courtesy towards them. Christians should be the most courteous people in the world. {HM, December 1, 1894}

All who, like Rahab the Canaanite, and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God, were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As the numbers of Israel increased they were to enlarge their borders, until their kingdom should embrace the world.

God desired to bring all peoples under His merciful rule. He desired that the earth should be filled with joy and peace. He created man for happiness, and He longs to fill human hearts with the peace of heaven. He desires that the families below shall be a symbol of the great family above. {COL 290}

Mutual Trust Needed Between Husband and Wife—I was shown that although a couple were married, gave themselves to each other by a most solemn vow in the sight of heaven and

holy angels, and the two were one, yet each had a separate identity which the marriage covenant could not destroy. {10MR 24-5}

## **8. Elkanah and Hannah: Fulfilling a Vow**

**Biblical material:** 1 Samuel 1:1-2:26.

### **Quotes**

- The woman who fasts and observes religious vows without the permission of her husband shortens his life, and goes to hell. *Chanakya, politician and writer 350-275 BC*
- Vows can't change nature, priests are only men. *Robert Browning*
- Keep your dreams alive. Understand to achieve anything requires faith and belief in yourself, vision, hard work, determination, and dedication. Remember all things are possible for those who believe. *Gail Devers*
- The only tyranny I accept in this world is the "still small voice" within me. *Mahatma Gandhi*
- There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "All right, then, have it your own way." *C. S. Lewis*

### **Questions**

How to relate to the concept of a religious vow? What principles can be derived from this very different cultural experience? Recognizing that Israel was far from being the best representation of God at this time, how does God appear in this story? What would have happened if Hannah had not fulfilled her vow? What of Jephthah's vow?

### **Discussion**

The story of Samuel comes at a very low time in the spiritual experience of Israel. The sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, are described as having no regard for the Lord. This is the heart of their problem, since they then treated the worship services as a business they could exploit. They even slept with the serving women at the Tent of Meeting.

That's the context, so much should not be expected. Even Eli, indulgent father and priest-in-charge, rebuked Hannah because he thought she was attending services drunk. But Hannah is pleading with God to honor her with a son, particularly because wife number 2 was taunting her. One wonders how God answers our prayers, the more when he knows all the circumstances. Was it wise for Samuel to be brought up under the influence of religious leaders like Hophni and Phinehas? Despite the regrettable circumstances, God honors the request, and good comes from the bad situation. Yet how much better if Israel had not fallen so low... God is so often having to operate so far from the ideal that it's amazing that there are any successes at all!

### **Comment from A. Graham Maxwell**

Here's Hannah in another custom. She's living in bigamy. Elkanah has two wives, and Hannah comes up and prays for a son. As you know the God Who doesn't try to change customs, especially He doesn't ask people to change them when they are totally unable to do so, what would you expect Him to do when Hannah prayed for a son?

Would He say, "You go home and persuade Elkanah to divorce the other wife, and I'll bless you with a son?"

And you remember Hannah's reason for grief. She hadn't produced a son, and what did husbands think of wives who did not produce sons in those days? Never mind the daughters. They didn't even count them. The Apocrypha even says a little later that to have a daughter is a grave disadvantage. That's interesting to read. That's in the Apocrypha, mind you! That isn't a key text.

Even in the time of Christ, they didn't count the girls, the women, the children. In the feeding of the 5,000, there may have been 20,000 there, but they only counted the men, besides the women and the children, you do understand.

And so Hannah wanted to be loved by her husband, who maybe had another wife with lots of boys. She said, "I need a son, God, or my husband will not love me." Is that a good reason? Well, all that we read is that God blessed her with a son.

And Hannah said, in her gratitude, "I will dedicate him, and before he is very old I'll bring him up to live here at headquarters." I mean, what finer place for a little boy to grow up in than a place where Hophni and Phinehas are assaulting women in the temple when they come to worship! What an awful place to bring that boy. It might have been better if he'd stayed home. But she went ahead and brought Samuel up. By the way, what happened to Samuel's sons? Were they any good? No, it's commented on, isn't it? In 1 Samuel 8 there is mention made of this. We often speak of Aaron's sons not doing well, and Eli's sons doing worse, and now look at Samuel's sons. 1 Samuel 8:1 (cited).

"Their only interest was money." "They took bribes, and they perverted justice." (See TEV). So here you have Eli's sons behaving so grossly, and Samuel's sons behaving so badly. A. Graham Maxwell, *The Picture of God in All 66*, West Covina Series, Tape #7, Ruth, 1 Samuel.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Elkanah, a Levite of Mount Ephraim, was a man of wealth and influence, and one who loved and feared the Lord. His wife, Hannah, was a woman of fervent piety. Gentle and unassuming, her character was marked with deep earnestness and a lofty faith.

The blessing so earnestly sought by every Hebrew was denied this godly pair; their home was not gladdened by the voice of childhood; and the desire to perpetuate his name led the husband—as it had led many others—to contract a second marriage. But this step, prompted by a lack of faith in God, did not bring happiness. Sons and daughters were added to the household; but the joy and beauty of God's sacred institution had been marred and the peace of the family was broken. Peninnah, the new wife, was jealous and narrow-minded, and she bore herself with pride and insolence. To Hannah, hope seemed crushed and life a weary burden; yet she met the trial with uncomplaining meekness. . . .

The burden which she could share with no earthly friend she cast upon God. Earnestly she pleaded that He would take away her reproach and grant her the precious gift of a son to nurture and train for Him. And she made a solemn vow that if her request were granted, she would dedicate her child to God, even from its birth. . . .

Hannah's prayer was granted; she received the gift for which she had so earnestly entreated. As she looked upon the child, she called him Samuel—"asked of God." {CC 137}

The father of Samuel was Elkanah, a Levite, who dwelt at Ramah, in Mount Ephraim. He was a person of wealth and influence, a kind husband, and a man who feared and revered God. Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, was a woman of piety and devotion. Humility, conscientiousness, and a firm reliance upon God, were ruling traits in her character. Of Hannah it might truly be said, in the words of the wise man: "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her."--ST, Oct. 27, 1881.{DG 39}

## 9. The Jobs: Living with Losses

**Biblical material:** Job 1:1-2:10

### Quotes

- When a man arrives at great prosperity God did it: and when he falls into disaster he did it himself. *Mark Twain*
- Noble souls, through dust and heat, rise from disaster and defeat the stronger. *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*
- Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live. *Norman Cousins*
- What looks like a loss may be the very event which is subsequently responsible for helping produce the major achievement of your life. *Srully Blotnick*

### Questions

Why is the experience of the Job's important to consider? While we know what was going on behind the scenes, they did not—so how do we react to their comments? What do we learn about the relationship of this Old Testament couple? In the context of the story, what of the charge that God is “using” people to prove his point in the great controversy.

### Discussion/ Comment

The only thing most people think of in connection with Job's wife is her advice to her husband to “Curse God and die.” This sounds harsh, and maybe it was said that way. Or perhaps Mrs. Job was suffering too, and this was her conclusion—that God had let them down. It's a very human response, especially after the loss of all your children, and then to watch you husband in such agony.

So even though this is a very ancient story, it still speaks to the challenges of our painful humanity. It has lessons we all need to learn about the whole context of the great controversy and the issues over God's character.

That's not to say that we should identify with all of the Job's conclusions. At times he is speaking out of his agony. Also he ascribes to God some of the credit for what Satan has done. For example, Job tells his wife, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” Job 2:10 NIV. He also tells her she is talking like a foolish woman—not that she was, you understand, but just talking like one...

Of course, we have very little information to make any determination on how the Job's marriage was working. From a prosperous family, circumstances change overnight and they lose everything. Perhaps we should be more charitable to Mrs. Job, who sees her husband trying to hold onto the shreds of his former life while experiencing unimaginable suffering. That is at the heart of her outburst, “Are you still holding on to your integrity?” Giving Job permission to speak from the depths of his pain, rather than hold back. She was certainly overwrought, and could see no sense in holding onto conventional faith.

Except that she confirmed the basis for Satan's accusations—that it could be said that the served God for the material benefits. As soon as they were gone, what use was God? Another

popular belief that has continued over the ages... Job's unhelpful comforters have their counterparts today, along with those who preach the health-wealth gospel.

Job's defense of God, unaware of his position as divinely-appointed spokesperson for humanity on God's side, spans our experience. He argues with God. He argues with his so-called friends. He regrets the day of his birth. He allows his feelings to speak. He does not pull the punches when questioning what is happening to him, representative of all humankind.

"And in all this Job did not sin." In other words, God does not consider even our arguing with him as wrong. In fact, he even invites it. For to accept that this word is the way a loving God would want it to be is in itself contemptible, a denial of God as he is. At the end of Job's experience, God does have to remind him that he is not all-knowing, and that some of his words have not really been in accordance with God's wisdom. But in contrast with the others, who want to ascribe to God the "punishment," God himself declares that "Job has said of me what is right."

We all feel for the personal and material loss. In our time, we may more strongly question the loss of Job's children, and their "replacement" at the end (they weren't the same!) But the point is made: this life is not everything, not even the most important life. All we have here is temporary and transient; nothing lasts. Not even the best of our relationships, our loves, have any kind of permanence in this life.

The good news of Job, even his family situation, his marriage, is that only as God is part of it will it have any real existence, any future. Whatever our promises to love each other forever, to pledge undying love, to desire an eternity of relationship—all is futile without the assurance that God will transform our passing lives into an eternal life with him. In divinely-inspired perspective, Job declares, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" Job 19:25-27 NIV.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Very early in the history of the world is given the life-record of one over whom this controversy of Satan's was waged. Of Job, the patriarch of Uz, the testimony of the Searcher of hearts was, "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil."

Against this man, Satan brought scornful charge: "Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?"

The Lord said unto Satan, "All that he hath is in thy power." "Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life."

Thus permitted, Satan swept away all that Job possessed,—flocks and herds, men-servants and maidens, sons and daughters; and he "smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown."

Still another element of bitterness was added to his cup. His friends, seeing in adversity but the retribution of sin, pressed on his bruised and burdened spirit their accusations of wrongdoing. . . . {SD 95}

Satan is always trying to press the soul into distrust of God, and therefore we must educate the mind to trust him. Talk faith and hope when Satan says, as did the wife of Job, "Curse God, and die." If you trust God, you will see more reason to trust him. As you talk of his goodness, you will see more of his love to talk about. Thus the mind may be trained to live in the

brightness of the Sun of righteousness, and not in the shadow which Satan casts athwart our path. Hope in God, who is the health of our countenance, and our God. {RH, September 1, 1891 }

## 10. David and Bathsheba: Adultery and After

**Biblical material:** 2 Samuel 11, 12.

### Quotes

- No adultery is bloodless. *Natalia Ginzburg*
- I've looked on many women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times. God knows I will do this and forgives me. *Jimmy Carter*
- Gambling, eating meat, wine-bibbing, adultery, hunting, thieving, debauchery - these seven things in this world lead to the hells. *Sanskrit Shloka*
- I do not think there are any men who are faithful to their wives. *Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis*

### Questions

Why is this adulterous relationship worthy of attention? How do we relate to each of the participants? Where did such passion lead? How could such things happen to someone who clearly knew God well? Why did the child pay the penalty for the sins of his parents? How does God come over in this whole story? Why do we not learn from such experiences?

### Discussion/ Comment

The simple story recorded in 2 Samuel reveals the heart of the tragedy, without much comment. The attraction is purely physical—David sees a beautiful woman bathing, and wants to sleep with her. Because he is king, he can use his power to arrange this. So it happens, and the chronicler mentions that the woman is “ceremonially clean.” To mention this in the same breath as the sin of adultery is intriguing...

Lust slaked, Bathsheba is sent home. End of relationship, such as it was. But then she discovers she is pregnant, and sends word to David. Wanting to cover up his paternity, David recalls Bathsheba's husband Uriah from the war zone. But Uriah has too much integrity to go home and enjoy his wife while his comrades are fighting. (Additionally, sexual intercourse would have meant Uriah would have become ceremonially unclean for a period, and thus unable to participate in the fighting army.). David's plan to make Uriah drunk and then have him go home to Bathsheba does not succeed either.

So David moves to plan B and arranges Uriah's death. This leaves David free to marry Bathsheba. Maybe David justified this scheme as a way of making sure Bathsheba and his child was cared for. Since Uriah was a foreigner, there would have been no kinsman to take over his line, as was required by Israelite law. David could then have stepped in and made provision for this himself, and would have appeared kind and honorable. The scheme had many benefits! But it is a horrific kind of cover-up that requires the death of an innocent man.

The prophet Nathan is sent to bring word of God's displeasure (and note how wisely Nathan does this!) The key thought is that if David wanted more, God would have given him more, so why “despise God” by this evil act? After David's confession, the prophet states that God has taken away David's sin, but because of the wider issues that God's enemies have been led by this to “utter contempt,” then the son produced by the adulterous relationship must die.

Such as judgment seems strange to us, convinced of personal responsibility. But once again, a different cultural truth prevails, seeing children (and especially sons) as a blessing from God, and a measurement of wealth and success. In the Old Testament, children are viewed very much as “enhanced possessions,” as the story of Job makes clear. David’s son is considered an extension of David, and to “reward” the adultery through the “blessing” of a son would have led to mistaken understandings. So the child will die, says God. David understands the concepts, but still pleads for his son while he lives. Once the child dies, he accepts the divine verdict.

David ceases his pleadings for his son, and then goes to comfort Bathsheba, who was surely grieving. Solomon, a “replacement” son is the result, showing that despite the sinful start to the relationship, it is not to be broken and condemned.

Bathsheba, as Solomon’s mother, also has another “bit part” later on, after the death of David. Sadly, she does not seem to have realized the real significance of Adonijah’s request, and has to experience the rebuke of her son. (1 Kings 2:22).

Not the best of models for courtship and marriage, certainly, and it seems that Bathsheba did not really learn about scheming men. Was she as naive at the end as at the beginning...?

But what of God in all of this. As is usually the case, he is having to deal with situations a long way removed from the ideal. He has to act in ways that his people can understand—hence the death of David and Bathsheba’s son. And yet he still allows the relationship to continue, without repeated judgments against it, illustrating God’s grace and forgiveness—to the extent that Israel’s next king is Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba. Solomon means restoration or peace, and to name their son in this way reveals the couple’s recognition of forgiveness and acceptance by God, despite the dreadful wrong they had committed.

The account warns us all of the dangers of feeling secure and then allowing ourselves to follow our own desires. The unhappy results of David’s foolishness is recorded for the benefit of those who read, to realize the tragic results of some moments of pleasure. God is not anti-pleasure; rather wanting us to enjoy all his good gifts in the right way, not in some furtive sneaking around that only brings trouble for all.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Skeptics have assailed Christianity and ridiculed the Bible, because David gave them occasion. They bring up to Christians the case of David—his sin in the case of Uriah and Bathsheba, his polygamy—and then assert that David is called a man after God’s own heart; and if the Bible record is correct, God justified David in his crimes.

I was shown that it was when David was pure, and walking in the counsel of God, that God called him a man after His own heart. When David departed from God, and stained his virtuous character by his crimes, he was no longer a man after God’s own heart. {TSB 94}

Bathsheba observed the customary days of mourning for her husband; and at their close “David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife.” He whose tender conscience and high sense of honor would not permit him, even when in peril of his life, to put forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed, had so fallen that he could wrong and murder one of his most faithful and most valiant soldiers, and hope to enjoy undisturbed the reward of his sin. Alas! how had the fine gold become dim! how had the most fine gold changed!

From the beginning Satan has portrayed to men the gains to be won by transgression. Thus he seduced angels. Thus he tempted Adam and Eve to sin. And thus he is still leading multitudes away from obedience to God. The path of transgression is made to appear desirable; “but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Proverbs 14:12. Happy they who, having ventured in

this way, learn how bitter are the fruits of sin, and turn from it betimes. God in His mercy did not leave David to be lured to utter ruin by the deceitful rewards of sin. {PP 720}

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## 11. Ahab and Jezebel: Abuse of Authority

**Biblical material:** 1 Kings 16:28-34; 1 Kings 17, 18.

### Quotes

- Where love rules, there is no will to power; and where power predominates, there love is lacking. The one is the shadow of the other. *Carl Jung*
- Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men. *Lord Acton*
- [Jesus'] ministry was clearly defined, and the alternatives to the illusion and temptations of the desert were spelled out. A choice was made—life abundant, full, and free for all. Make no mistake about it, the day that choice was made, Jesus became suspect. That day in the temple he sealed the fate already prepared for him. How was the world to understand one who rejected an offer of power and control? *Joan B. Campbell*
- There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty. *John Adams*
- Never work just for money or for power. They won't save your soul or help you sleep at night. *Marian Wright Edelman*

### Questions

What are the central issues in this story? Why did God permit Ahab to become king of Israel, knowing what damage Ahab and Jezebel would cause to the nation? Can we excuse behavior because of temperament and upbringing? What does this story say to our personal relationships? How does God try to work with people—and how does he look here?

### Discussion/Comment

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

Once again we have the example of what not to do. The blatant hostility to God, the demonic corruption of power, and the total depravity of moral and ethical behavior shows how far humanity can fall. And in all of this, were Ahab and Jezebel happy? What satisfaction did they gain from their pagan lifestyle? One may even wonder what benefit there is to be gained from studying such a deplorable couple. Yet God includes this story in his word, as part of the great controversy demonstration that is so essential to understand...

Much centers on the use of power. This is a primary aspect of the Devil's charges against God—that he misuses his power. Satan does not debate the almighty nature of God, rather he criticizes the way in which God utilizes and directs this power. In the story of Ahab and Jezebel we see in microcosm what really happens when power is abused. Instead of representing God, Ahab as king reveals what would happen if Satan took over. The innocent would suffer and die, the wicked would reign in idolatrous splendor, and the whole of society would be debased.

Ultimately even the wicked would not find joy in this kind of world, and the eventual result would be ruin and death for all.

Not because God steps in to punish, but because the final results are the natural consequences of sin, of choosing to be the opposite of God, who is all good, truth, and right. The story of Ahab and Jezebel demonstrates once again the disastrous results of exploiting power for selfish ends, and the destructive personal and societal consequences of failing to live by God's principles.

For this apostasy was not just personal, but national. The example of the royal couple as leaders led Israel to accept a false picture of God. 1 Kings 16:30 records that Ahab did more evil than any of the kings before him—he began to serve Baal and worship him. At the heart of this corruption is the embracing of the Devil's lies regarding God's nature and character.

The response through Elijah is to demonstrate the foolishness of belief in Baal, the fertility god who brought rain and blessed agriculture. By the imposition of the drought, Baal is proved to be false and powerless to help. And in the confrontation on Mt. Carmel, all the intercessory prayers of the priests of Baal are also proved pointless and worthless. Elijah's taunts are to the point, for why pray to a "god" who is not real?

At the demonstration of divine power—the fire falling from heaven—the people fall prostrate and acknowledge "the Lord he is God." The tragedy is that they are only persuaded by power, and not by truth. God is placed in the situation of having to win them not by force of argument but simply by the display of raw power. Like their forefathers at the foot of Mt. Sinai, they tremble with fear and promise that they will do whatever the Lord says. But their agreement lasts only as long as their fear. Once that is gone, they wander after the desires of their true hearts, and like Israel under Ahab and Jezebel, return to their evil natures once more...

### **Ellen White Comments**

Under the blighting influence of Ahab's rule, Israel wandered far from the living God and corrupted their ways before Him. . . . The dark shadow of apostasy covered the whole land. Images of Baalim and Ashtoreth were everywhere to be seen. Idolatrous temples and consecrated groves, wherein were worshiped the works of men's hands, were multiplied. The air was polluted with the smoke of the sacrifices offered to false gods. Hill and vale resounded with the drunken cries of a heathen priesthood who sacrificed to the sun, moon, and stars.

Through the influence of Jezebel and her impious priests, the people were taught that the idol gods that had been set up were deities, ruling by their mystic power the elements of earth, fire, and water. All the bounties of heaven—the running brooks, the streams of living water, the gentle dew, the showers of rain which refreshed the earth and caused the fields to bring forth abundantly—were ascribed to the favor of Baal and Ashtoreth, instead of to the Giver of every good and perfect gift. The people forgot that the hills and valleys, the streams and fountains, were in the hand of the living God, that He controlled the sun, the clouds of heaven, and all the powers of nature. . . .

In their blind folly they chose to reject God and His worship.

How few realize the power of an unconsecrated woman. . . . God would have been with Ahab if he had walked in the counsel of heaven. But Ahab did not do this. He married a woman given to idolatry. Jezebel had more power over the king than God had. She led him into idolatry, and with him the people. {CC 204}

God chooses men of a humble and contrite spirit through whom he can work, and imparts to them his wisdom. They are little in their own eyes, and will not interpret success as the result

of their own smartness, but will glorify God. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” If men are entrusted with great responsibilities, this is no assurance of their fitness for their position. The assurance comes after test and trial. If they evidence that they sense their own weakness, if they make God their trust, the Lord will supply them with his wisdom. {1888 1820}

## 12. Hosea and Gomer: Forgiving the Unfaithful

**Biblical material:** Hosea 1-3.

### Quotes

- It is better to be unfaithful than to be faithful without wanting to be. *Brigitte Bardot*
- No lover, if he be of good faith, and sincere, will deny he would prefer to see his mistress dead than unfaithful. *Marquis de Sade*
- Those who are not in love with the Lord are foolish and false—they are faithless cynics. They suffer the most extreme agonies of birth and death; they die over and over again, and they rot away in manure. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*
- Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens. *J. R. R. Tolkien*

### Questions

How could God even instruct a prophet to marry a prostitute? What does this tell us about God and his relationship to us? Does this mean we are supposed to tolerate all kinds of immoral behavior? What are the spiritual lessons we are supposed to take away from this married couple’s story? How does this experience speak of God in the setting of the great controversy?

### Discussion

The instruction by God to marry a prostitute was for a very specific reason. This Old Testament couple are certainly not being presented as a model, but as an acted parable of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. That point must remain uppermost in our consideration of this example of a married couple. This is a far cry from God’s original intent for Adam and Eve!

That this should even be considered as something for our study reflects the desire of God to recognize who we are and what we’re doing. The dramatic acted parable reveals that God will use all kinds of means to gain our attention, to break through our self-satisfied apathy and recognize how far we are away from him. Just as a prostitute-wife continually betrays her husband, so do we act towards the God we claim to love—that is the message of Hosea.

But this is not to just criticize and condemn. Hosea paints a picture of God the cuckold, who despite the blatant and flagrant unfaithfulness of his people, still wishes for their return, because of his unfailing love. Hosea 11 is a masterpiece that describes the anguished desire of God who wants us back, home with him once more. Who can remain unmoved at God’s agonized cry: “How can I give you up? How can I let you go?” As a father weeping over his wayward children, as a husband tormented by the actions of a faithless wife, God pleads with us to come back to him—not for his sake, but because of his concern for us. He wants to heal us, and he is the only one who can.

### Comment from A. Graham Maxwell

God is always willing to take us back... But Israel did not come back. And yet, through it all there were individuals who knew God very well. Hosea must have known God well to be willing to

go through with this thing.... I'm sure he learned a great deal from this as well. But surely it was primarily for the people.

Do you notice, though, what it is that all the prophets seem to say is the cause of the trouble? They're still religious, they're still sacrificing. But you notice in Hosea 4:6, why are they perishing? "My people are dying for lack of knowledge, and because you have rejected knowledge, I have rejected you from being priests to Me." Now, what knowledge? Well, the next line does say, "because you have forgotten the law of your God." So that's in there. That is all the teachings; it's not just the Decalogue. All the teachings of God, "you have forgotten them." Notice up above, in verse 1. "Now, hear what the Lord says, you people of Israel, for the Lord has a quarrel with the inhabitants of the land. There is no honesty, nor compassion, nor knowledge *of God*." You notice, how often that's mentioned.

The people are perishing because they don't know God. And of course if you don't know God, you don't understand His instruction. In fact, if you don't know God, His laws may be misunderstood, even, and become a curse rather than a help. Now, that it is the knowledge of God is mentioned so many times.

Look at Hosea 5:4. "It is their deeds which block their pathway back to God, for their spirit is steeped in unfaithfulness." See, untrustworthiness. It is always mentioned, all through Scripture. And the other thing is, they know nothing of the Lord. Now, they're worshipping. Do you remember in Jeremiah, the prophets who were prophesying in the name of the Lord, but they were lying? They really didn't know God. They knew nothing of the Lord, even though they were still apparently worshipping God. *A Graham Maxwell, "THE PICTURE OF GOD IN ALL 66," Tape #24.*

### **Ellen White Comments**

If men would do their duty as faithful stewards of their Lord's goods, there would be no cry for bread, none suffering in destitution, none naked and in want. It is the unfaithfulness of men that brings about the state of suffering in which humanity is plunged. If those whom God has made stewards would but appropriate their Lord's goods to the object for which He gave to them, this state of suffering would not exist. The Lord tests men by giving them an abundance of good things, just as He tested the rich man of the parable. If we prove ourselves unfaithful in the righteous mammon, who shall entrust us the true riches? It will be those who have stood the test on the earth, who have been found faithful, who have obeyed the words of the Lord in being merciful, in using their means for the advancement of His kingdom, that will hear from the lips of the Master, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."--Review and Herald, June 26, 1894. {RC 227}

If you are abiding in Christ, learning in His school, you will not be rude, dishonest, or unfaithful. The cross of Christ cuts to the root of all unholy passions and practices. Whatever the nature of your work, you will carry the principles of Christ into your labor and identify yourself with the task given into your hands. Your interest will be one with that of your employer. If you are paid for your time, you will realize that the time for work is not your own, but belongs to the one who pays you for it. If you are careless and extravagant, wasting material, squandering time, failing to be painstaking and diligent, you are registered in the books of heaven as an unfaithful servant. . . . Faithfulness, economy, caretaking, thoroughness, should characterize all our work... "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). {TMK 93}

The greatest detriment to our churches, that which brings them into weakness and disfavor with God, is unhappy jealousies and differences. "Now the works of the flesh are

manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Then let every soul examine himself, and see if he is approaching the committal of any such sins. {RH, June 28, 1887}

### 13. Yahweh and Israel: Fulfillment beyond Failure

**Biblical material:** Exod. 3:6-14; 6:6-8; Josh. 24:1-18; Jer. 5:19, 22; Ezek. 16:26-29, 34; Hosea 9:1; John 20:21; Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 John 2:12.

#### Quotes

- Your faithfulness makes you trustworthy to God. *Edwin Louis Cole*
- The only way to make a man trustworthy is to trust him. *Henry L. Stimson*
- A true friend never breaches the trust of his companion or stabs in his back. He is trustworthy and reliable. One should therefore always try to be a true and reliable friend. *Sam Veda*
- When all is said and done, friendship is the only trustworthy fabric of the affections. So-called love is a delirious inhuman state of mind: when hot it substitutes indulgence for fair play; when cold it is cruel, but friendship is warmth in cold, firm ground in a bog. *Miles Franklin*
- For changes to be of any true value, they’ve got to be lasting and consistent. *Anthony Robbins*

#### Questions

Why did God continue so long with Israel? Knowing the future, why does God bother? What of ourselves—how do we relate to God? What is the on-looking universe gaining by examining what happens here on earth? How do we as “spiritual Israel” differ from ancient Israel? What are the most important “take home” lessons from our studies this quarter?

#### Discussion/ Comment

“Your maker is your husband.” Isaiah 54:5 NIV. Here is the heart of the relationship—God uses all the most personal and intimate imagery to persuade us that he is not hostile, that he does not look for servants, but friends. Friends that are more than mere acquaintances, rather the closest of friends such as father and son, mother and daughter, man and wife. As we’ve looked at the examples of Old Testament couples, we have often been disappointed at the failures. Now as we consider the “couple” this week—God and Israel, we conclude that just like Gomer failed Hosea, Israel failed God. From the New Testament we learn that we are spiritual Israel. And are we in reality any different to Israel of old?

The lesson suggests that there is “fulfillment beyond failure.” But there remains much failure in this time too. As is so clear in the majority of marriage relationships we have considered, the lesson is that there is so much negative and very little positive. Yet as we consider the lengths God is prepared to go to win us back to love and trust, then we can have supreme confidence—not in ourselves, but in the nature and capacity of God to love us back into a trusting relationship with him.

In Jeremiah (2:2, 3) God compares Israel to a bride, in the wilderness wanderings. Yet how often, even then, did the bride complain—about the food, the bitter water, the desert, wishing to be back in slavery in Egypt. God the liberator was surely terrible disappointed by his murmuring and troublesome bride. Yet he is not willing to give her up, and tries to teach vital lessons on the way. But as we know, that “bride generation” perished in the wilderness. Why? Because of lack of trust, an unwillingness to be teachable, and a real “problem attitude” to their loving Lord.

In Numbers 25:1-3 (NIV) we see Israel so quickly adopting a “different” worship style: “While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor.” It seems that the temptation to “worship” in this sensual, self-gratifying way was a huge temptation. And God had to step in to prevent it, because it was so completely against all the true God represents. How could his people truly reveal God through fertility orgies. It may have seemed to those involved that to follow Moabite customs and religion was both intriguing and satisfying. But the heart of the problem is false worship and a misrepresentation of who God is. God wishes to reveal who he is, and he cannot do that through some Canaanite sex orgy!

God is revealed in the clearest way through Jesus, who said himself that he came to reveal the Father. As we’ve looked at some of these Old Testament examples, including the nation of Israel, we can only conclude that there was no other way for God to get his message across. He had tried to do this through prophets, priests, and people, with very mixed results. The only way to truly reveal God was for God to come himself. He is the one who reaches out to us. The church—us—we are the bride of Christ. He wants to have that level of closeness and friendship with each of us. And who would want to say no to such a loving Lord and friend?

### **Ellen White Comments**

The great sin of ancient Israel was in turning from God to idols. This is also the great sin of modern Israel. The apostle Paul said to the Gentile churches that he had raised up, “Ye turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from Heaven.” He could truly say to many of them, “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” When he saw them becoming indifferent, the ardor of their faith chilled by backslidings, he exclaimed, “I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” He entreats them to be followers of God as dear children, and to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. Again, he exhorts them to walk in Christ Jesus, even as they had received him, that they might be rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith. He reminds them, “Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.” {RH, June 3, 1880}

**A Lesson from the Failure of Ancient Israel** When the Israelites entered Canaan, they did not fulfil God’s purpose by taking possession of the whole land. After making a partial conquest, they settled down to enjoy the fruit of their victories. In their unbelief and love of ease, they congregated in the portions already conquered, instead of pushing forward to occupy new territory. Thus they began to depart from God. By their failure to carry out His purpose they

made it impossible for Him to fulfil to them His promise of blessing. Is not the church of today doing the same thing? With the whole world before them in need of the gospel, professed Christians congregate where they themselves can enjoy gospel privileges. They do not feel the necessity of occupying new territory, carrying the message of salvation into regions beyond. They refuse to fulfil Christ's commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Are they less guilty than was the Jewish church? {ChS 184-5}

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