

The End of the Beginning



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 41:41–50:26.*

Memory Text: “God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (*Genesis 45:7, NKJV*).

What is involved here is that in world history something else results from the actions of men than what they intend and achieve, something else than what they know or want. They accomplish their interest; but something else is accomplished which was implied in it, but which was not in the consciousness and the intention of the actors.”—G. W. F. Hegel, “The Philosophy of History”; in *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), pp. 16, 17.

This week, as we come to the end of the beginning, we can see something of the principle stated above unfold. Despite the best, or the worst, of human intentions; despite what seems to be deceit, disappointment, sin, and disaster, “something else results from the actions of men than what they intend and achieve.” That “something,” of course, is the Lord working out His divine plan in human history.

Because most of us know the story and how it ends, the providence revealed in the pages of Genesis doesn't take us by surprise. For those involved in the story itself, however, it took an incredible amount of faith to believe that God would work it all out as promised, especially in some dire circumstances. No wonder Hebrews 11 says “by faith Abraham,” “by faith Isaac,” “by faith Sarah,” “by faith Jacob.” This was a faith that trusted in what was not fully seen or completely understood, a faith that had to lean only on the promise of God and nothing else.

Sound familiar?

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

Providence Unfolds *(Gen. 41:41–42:23)*

Overnight Joseph went from being a slave in prison to the second-highest leader in Egypt. Now, though, a whole new set of challenges would await him.

Read Genesis 41:45. What great new potential challenge did this pose to Joseph’s faith and fidelity to God? See also 1 Kings 11:1.

Genesis 41:50-52 reveal Joseph settling into his new existence. The names Joseph gave his two sons reflect his own experience. The name *Manasseh* is related to the Hebrew verb “make to forget” and reflects the thought that his firstborn boy helped his father to forget the cruel past. *Ephraim*, the second son’s name, seems to mean “twice fruitful” and represented Joseph’s joyous feelings and the opening of a new chapter in his life.

As we read the rest of Genesis 41 and the first 17 verses of Genesis 42, we can see the providence of God unfolding. We see the steps leading to the fulfillment of Jacob’s dreams way back in Genesis 37. The dreamer’s dreams (*Gen. 37:19*) were soon coming to fruition in a manner that only the sovereign Lord could have arranged. This story is an amazing testimony to the power of God to fulfill what He says He will do in ways that far transcend our human understanding. The famine driving his brothers into his hands was, clearly, the Lord working out His will.

What words do the brothers speak among themselves that show the guilt they harbored even after all these years? *Gen. 42:21-23*.

The great suffering of their father over the loss of Joseph constantly brought before these brothers the gravity of their sin. Even worse was the fact that they couldn’t tell their father the truth, that Joseph wasn’t even dead. Little did they realize the grief that they would bring upon themselves and their family by their actions.

If you are making any major decisions soon, take the time to weigh all the possible consequences. Why is it so important to make sure any decision you make doesn’t violate any principles that God has revealed in His Word?

Joseph and His Brothers (*Genesis 42, 43*)

Joseph's ploy with his brothers showed that he was trying to teach them a lesson, as well as learn more about his own family.

Notice the reaction of the brothers at finding the money in their sacks (*Gen. 42:24-28*). What does it signify about their faith and understanding of God?

Read verses 36-38. What does this tell us about the character of Reuben?

“During the years since Joseph had been separated from his brothers, these sons of Jacob had changed in character. Envious, turbulent, deceptive, cruel, and revengeful they had been; but now, when tested by adversity, they were shown to be unselfish, true to one another, devoted to their father, and, themselves middle-aged men, subject to his authority.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 225.

Jacob's response to Reuben's offer helped reveal the pain he had suffered at the loss of Joseph. Only when the famine got so severe that he had no choice (*Gen. 43:8*) did he agree to let his youngest son go back with them.

What was Joseph's purpose in making the feast in *Genesis 43:31-34*?

Much to their astonishment, Joseph sat his brothers down in the order of their birth, giving the youngest, Benjamin, the most food. He did this in order to “ascertain if the youngest brother was regarded with the envy and hatred that had been manifested toward him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 228. The fact that they ate and drank and were merry with him (*Gen. 43:34*) showed Joseph that they, indeed, had changed.

No doubt a great deal of suffering changed those brothers from what they once were to what they had become. How has suffering worked in your own life? What changes has it wrought in you? How can God use suffering to bring about something positive in someone?

Family Reunion (*Genesis 44–47*)

Joseph still wasn't done. The final test came (*Genesis 44*). Judah's confession and willingness to give himself instead of his brother, all for the good of his father, proved to him that his brothers were new men. It was only then that Joseph revealed his identity.

Read the words of Joseph to his brothers (*Gen. 45:1-13*). **What does he say to show that his faith had, even after all these years, remained intact?**

Joseph's faith in God during the dark years was now especially rewarded. What he couldn't see before suddenly became clear to him. God had worked it out in ways that he couldn't have imagined. There's a good lesson here for all of us. If we seek to stay faithful, regardless of our circumstances, God will work things out in the end, even if it's at the very end (*Rev. 21:1*).

The rest of Genesis 45 deals with the preparations to get the whole family together once again; in Genesis 46, Jacob, on hearing about Joseph, begins the long journey to Egypt. On the way he stops at Beersheba, where his grandfather Abraham had worshiped and his father had erected an altar subsequent to a divine repetition of the covenant blessings (*Gen. 21:33, 26:23-25*). As Jacob sacrifices and renews his covenant commitment to the God of his father, Isaac, the Lord reassures him of the covenant promises made at Bethel, with the added detail that Jacob's family would grow into nationhood in Egypt (*Gen. 46:1-4*).

After Jacob and his family reached Egypt, a glad reunion took place (*vss. 29, 30*). **Why did Joseph want his family to tell the Egyptians that they were shepherds, an occupation loathsome to Egyptians?** (*vss. 31–34*).

Though the text doesn't say explicitly, Joseph must have known the corrupting influence of Egypt. This way, by keeping them separated from the Egyptians, he sought to protect the spiritual integrity of his extended family. Obviously, Joseph knew something of their special calling. No doubt, the incredible unfolding of events that brought him and his family together again only affirmed for him the reality of that calling.

The Patriarchal Blessings *(Gen. 47:28–49:28)*

After spending 17 happy years in Egypt surrounded by those dearest to him, Jacob felt death approaching. He called his sons to him for a last farewell.

Go back over the promises given to Jacob by God over the years (*Gen. 28:12-15, 35:9-15, 46:2-4*). **Given the conditions and circumstances that surrounded him now, why should it have been easy for him to believe that the Lord would fulfill His promises? See also *Gen. 46:26, 47:27*.**

As with Joseph, Jacob probably for the first time was able to see, from a human perspective, how God had been able to work out all that He promised. No doubt this reality gave the old man solace in his old age.

Before his death Jacob, through divine inspiration, revealed the future of his descendants (*Genesis 49*). The power of God constrained him to declare the truth, however painful to himself. Jacob withdrew the rights of the firstborn from Reuben and uttered a curse for the crime of Levi and Simeon. The later history of Levi's family illustrates how a curse can be turned into a blessing.

God's Word ever reveals both the virtues and vices, the failures and successes, of humans. The pages of Scripture are realistic and conceal neither the faults of its most revered and admired heroes nor their victories attained through the power of God. God's men and women are depicted as "subject to like passions as we are" (*James 5:17; see also Acts 14:15*).

Jacob revealed the corporate destiny of each tribal line. Yet, each line was composed of individuals with free will and free choice, especially in regard to their relationship with God, just as each of us experiences free will, as well. Whatever predictions God makes about nations and their future aren't the same as predestinating individuals to either salvation or damnation. God's foreknowledge of our choice isn't the same as predetermining those choices.

"Character," it has been said, "is destiny." How do you understand that idea? How does your own character influence decisions you make? What character changes would you like to see in your own life?

The End of the Beginning *(Gen. 49:29–50:26)*

Genesis 50 is, in a sense, the end of the beginning. The book went from Creation to the Fall to the Flood to the covenant promises made to Abraham and to his seed. However difficult it was, at times, to see how these promises ever could be fulfilled, by the time the book ends we can see the groundwork set for everything that God had promised: the children of Abraham as a great nation living as “a stranger in a land that is not theirs” (*Gen. 15:13*), a people who will one day be called out of Egypt in order that “all the nations of the earth [shall] be blessed” in them (*Gen. 22:18*).

Read Genesis 50. What very human reaction do we see in Joseph’s brothers?

Their plea for forgiveness was, of course, unnecessary. Joseph had, obviously, forgiven them a long time ago. Now, finally, they could see just how genuine that forgiveness was. We see here, again, another example of the character and integrity of Joseph. In this way he functions as a “type” of Christ, forgiving them for what many would deem unforgivable.

Read carefully Joseph’s response to his brothers (*vss. 19, 20*). How, in that response, do we see what is, in many ways, a key theme not only of Genesis but of the whole Bible? What great principle is expressed here? What hope should we draw from it?

However difficult it often is for us to see it from our perspective (just as it was difficult for Abraham on Moriah or Joseph in the dungeon), God is working out His plans to bring out “good” and to “save much people alive” (*vs. 20*). Whoever we are, whatever our circumstances, we must remember that the same God revealed in Genesis is the same God revealed in Revelation, a book unfolding in our times and telling our story (*Rev. 12:17*) as Genesis did the patriarchs.

Finally, Genesis began with a miracle, the miracle of Creation. And just as it took a miracle to create this world, it will take a miracle to save it. We’ve seen that miracle alluded to, first in Genesis 3:15 then in Genesis 22—the miracle of Jesus crucified, resurrected, and coming again.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 224–240; *The SDA Bible Commentary*; comments on Genesis 41:41–50:26.

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 237.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss this question: If there is one major theme that you could pull from the book of Genesis that can apply to our lives today, what would that be?
- ❷ Much of the suffering we’ve seen here was brought upon people by their own actions, just as much of the suffering we see today is, as well. Does that make any difference in regard to how we should treat those people and seek to help them? Justify your answer.
- ❸ Ask class members to choose a story from Genesis that meant the most to them in terms of giving them some practical truth that helped them deal with whatever personal situations they were facing.

The Real Prize

by LYNN ROBERT

When my brother-in-law, Ruphino, joined the Adventist Church, we were not too happy. We accused him of being the antichrist and of following a false prophet. Ruphino tried to share his new beliefs with us, but we refused to listen. Even Ruphino's wife did not want to hear about this new religion. We were happy with our own church.

Then our daughter, Lelei, started attending church with her uncle Ruphino. We tried to discourage her, but she was determined.

One day Ruphino told us that the church was planning evangelistic meetings. We were ready with all sorts of excuses to avoid going with Ruphino. But Ruphino surprised us and said, "If I take ten people to the meetings, I get a really great prize, a study Bible." He invited me first then my husband, Rudy. Rudy misunderstood what Ruphino said and thought that he would win a prize—maybe even some money—if he went with Ruphino. So he agreed to go.

Then Rudy told the whole family to go—even the woman who was living with us! He invited others until ten people agreed to go. When Ruphino stood with his guests to accept his prize Bible, Rudy forgot about the money he thought he was going to win.

The speaker's message fascinated me. He talked about some beasts coming out of water and the antichrist. His topic was getting really interesting when he stopped. "If you want to know who this antichrist is, come back tomorrow," he said. We all wanted to know more, so we all returned the next night. Pieces of information fell into place, and we realized we had known pieces of the puzzle, but we had not put them together correctly.

When the pastor distributed cards asking people to check the appropriate boxes, Rudy checked everything but the "I want to be baptized" box. I asked him why, and he said, "I was born into my church, and I will die in that church." I knew that he meant it.

The pastor had said something that really impressed me. "If you see the light, walk in the light." I was seeing the truth, and I realized that I had to follow that light or risk being lost. But what about my husband?



When the meetings ended, the pastor invited us to join God's remnant church. We all agreed, even Rudy. Six of us were baptized together, and others joined God's family later.

We are evidence that mission offerings win souls. Thank you for giving.

LYNN ROBERT *and her family live in Guam.*

James W. Zackrison is the principal contributor for this quarter's Bible study guide, *Ecclesiastes*. Unlike other books in Scripture, which often begin with a strong affirmation about God ("The Word of the Lord to . . ."), *Ecclesiastes* commences with a cry about the meaninglessness of life. "Vanities of vanities . . . all is vanity." This opening sounds more like modern secular writers than a prophet of Yahweh. Nevertheless, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that *Ecclesiastes* was placed in the canon of Scripture, because God has in it a message for us: How cynical, bitter, and empty life is apart from the knowledge of Him!

Lesson 1—The Rise and the Fall of the House of Solomon

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Wisdom of Solomon (*1 Kings 4:29-34*)

MONDAY: Solomon's Walk With the Lord (*1 Kings 3:16-28*)

TUESDAY: Solomon in God's Temple (*2 Chronicles 6*)

WEDNESDAY: The Fall of Solomon (*1 Cor. 10:12*)

THURSDAY: Solomon's Last Days (*1 Kings 11:11-13*)

Memory Text—*Luke 12:48*

Sabbath Gem: No matter who we are, what we have, or even how close to God we walk, in the end we are fallen creatures with natures so rotten that unless we daily surrender ourselves to God (*Luke 9:23*), we are in danger of allowing those natures to ruin us.

Lesson 2—Nothing New Under the Sun?

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Kohelet in Jerusalem (*Eccles. 1:1*)

MONDAY: Vanity of Vanities (*Eccles. 1:2*)

TUESDAY: The Sun Also Rises (*Eccles. 1:4-11*)

WEDNESDAY: Beyond the Cycles (*Eccles. 1:9, NKJV*)

THURSDAY: "Under the Sun" (*Eccles. 1:12-18*)

Memory Text—*Ecclesiastes 1:9, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The first chapter of *Ecclesiastes* begins with a look at the futility and meaninglessness of life lived without the knowledge of God.

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