

Story and History



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 25

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 39:6–12; Joshua 3:9–17; 1 Samuel 24:1–6; 1 Kings 12:1–16; Job 1:1–12.

MEMORY VERSE: “God has breathed life into all of Scripture [the Bible]. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, a man of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NIV).

SOME PEOPLE MAY NOT CARE FOR THE STUDY OF HISTORY ITSELF. But everybody loves a good story. Every civilization¹ has a rich treasure-house of stories. These stories explain (or claim to explain) the beginnings, values, relationships,² and purpose of a culture.³ These stories often become teaching tools as they are told over generations.⁴

In the modern age, storytelling was not considered important. People turned to facts and scientific answers to explain life. But facts alone could not answer the most important questions of life. Today, a new generation of people has rediscovered the power of stories.

In a way, the Bible is “modern” because it is full of stories. They are personal stories that show us the truth about God and His relationship with sinners. These stories describe how real people struggle with real-life problems and relate to the living God, who offers answers to these problems.

Every story needs a setting (time and place). This week we will explore different settings and their historical backgrounds. In this way, we hope to better understand the characters we will be studying all quarter.

1. civilization—a particular well-organized and developed society.

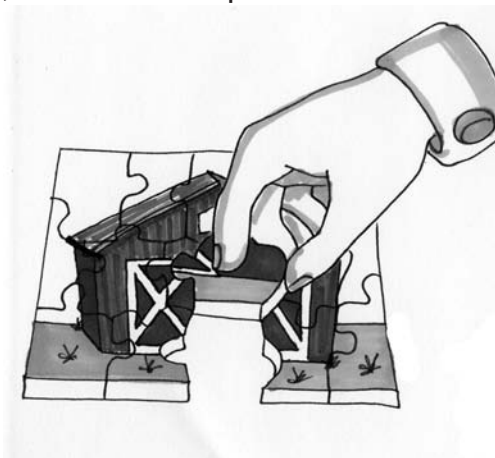
2. relationships—the way in which two or more people or things are connected.

3. culture—the beliefs, customs, arts, and so on, of a particular society, group, place, or time.

4. generations—groups of people born and living during the same times.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 26**PEOPLE AND PLOTS
(Job 1:1–12)**

Plot is described as a series of events that leads to an ending. Everyone is born, lives, and one day dies. These are the important events of the plot of life. In between, life includes many smaller plots that are often filled with struggles or tension.⁵ Searching for a plot means trying to connect all the related parts of the story in order to understand the big picture. In the book of Job, for example, there are two plots.



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According to Job 1:1–12, what are the two plots in the story of Job?

If we want to understand the story

of Job, we need to understand that it has two parts. In fact, the Bible has no stories that have only one plot. This is because God is always active in history and in human⁶ lives. Sometimes He works quietly behind the scenes. Imagine that the plots in the first two chapters of Job are like the channels on a TV set. As we read, we jump between the earthly and the heavenly plots in the same way that we flip back and forth between channels on TV.

But stories are more than plots. People make stories.

Describe the prophet⁷ Huldah based on 2 Kings 22:14.

Characters⁸ are closely connected to the plot of the story. How we understand the character(s) depends on the information given by the narrator,⁹ or person telling the story. This person even may be one of the characters. Let us take Huldah as an example: is she one of the important characters in the story? No. This story is really about how the book of the Law was found during the rule of King Josiah. Huldah may not be the main (most important) character, but every character in a story is important to the development (growth) of the story. Does Huldah have children? How old is she? We do not know the answers to these questions. Bible

5. tension—a difficult situation caused by the opposite needs or effects of two different ideas, desires, and so on.

6. human—having to do with men, women, or children.

7. prophet—a man or woman who is a spokesperson for God. God gives a prophet special messages to give to His people. A prophet also speaks to God on behalf of His people. God may also give a prophet warnings about what will happen in the future.

8. characters—people who appear in a story.

9. narrator—the person who tells a story.

stories often are very short. So, we need to pay close attention to every piece of information we get. The story shows that Huldah was thought to be a trustworthy prophetess of the Lord. The author of this story gives us information about her husband's family. This is because women during Old Testament times were known by their connection (tie) with the families of their husbands. Huldah's address is also given. As in modern times, proper documents¹⁰ always require a name and an address to prove that a person, such as Huldah the prophetess, is who she says she is.

What is your plot? What kind of character are you? If your story was written as a Bible story, would it be the way you would want it to be?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 27

WHERE AND HOW? (1 Samuel 24:1–6)

Setting (time and place) makes the story real and gives it atmosphere¹¹ and mood.¹² For example, in Ruth 4:1, 2, why does Boaz bring up his legal case in public at the gate and not in his home or in the house of the mayor of the city of Bethlehem? Clearly, the

gate is the most public place in early Bible times. It adds an important legal element¹³ to the story. Setting also can tell us about the time period of the story. For example, if a story is located inside a car or in an airport terminal, we know right away that the story does not come from the time of King David or Martin Luther.¹⁴

Compare¹⁵ the settings of the following two stories: 1 Samuel 24:1–6 and Genesis 39:6–12. How do the settings help develop (build) the plots of the stories?

Settings help us to better understand the action of a story. David and his men are alone with Saul, who is unprotected and very weak. This is the perfect chance for David to get rid of Saul before Saul gets rid of David. But David does not take it. The setting highlights the stellar (excellent) character¹⁶ of David. It shows the respect David has for God's anointed (chosen) leader.

The setting in the story of Joseph also shows an opportunity (chance) for something to happen. Joseph is handsome. And he is in a position of power. His master's wife desires him. They are alone in the house. Joseph shows his pure heart by refusing to give in to lust.¹⁷

10. documents—official (proper) papers that give information about something or that are used as proof of something.

11. atmosphere—the particular way a place or situation makes you feel.

12. mood—a quality that creates a particular feeling.

13. element—a particular part of something.

14. Martin Luther—(1483–1546). Leader of the Reformation in Germany. This reformation, or change, began when Bible students did not agree with the Roman Catholic Church's belief in how we are saved.

15. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

16. character—who someone is; all that a person does, feels, and thinks are what he or she is made of.

17. lust—strong feeling of sexual desire.



Settings help us to better understand the action of the story.

But setting is not the only important part of a story. We need to think about the point of view¹⁸ of the speaker too. We see the story develop (build) through words of the narrator or speaker. The narrator gives us important information about the story. But sometimes he or she may hold back information from us. This is often done in secular (not religious) stories. And while we do have points of view in Bible stories, we must believe, as we read them, that they are God's truth inspired¹⁹ by the Holy Spirit.

Think of David and Joseph in their settings. They easily could have made excuses for doing something other than what they did. But they did not. This should tell us a lot about their characters. How often do

you make excuses for your wrong actions?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 28

FROM VICTORY²⁰ TO THE “DARK AGES” (Joshua 3:9–17)

For the rest of this week's lesson, we will study more closely a few important periods in the history of Israel. This will serve as the historical background for all the people we will be studying. We begin with the time Israel entered the Promised Land.

God did many miracles (signs and wonders) during the Exodus²¹ and the journey through the wilderness.²² Now, for the second time, the people of Israel have reached the border of the Promised Land. Under their new leader, Joshua, they are ready to cross over the Jordan on dry land (Joshua 3:16, 17). This miracle reminds us of the crossing of the Red Sea during the time of the Exodus (Exodus 14).

Read Joshua 3:9–17. What is the purpose of the miracle in this passage?

Canaan was not taken by Israel because of Joshua's clever planning or the courageous efforts of Israel. Victory over the people of the Canaanite city-states came only by God's help and power. When Israel was obedient, God helped them to

18. point of view—a way of looking at or thinking about something.

19. inspired—having a particular cause or influence.

20. victory—winning.

21. Exodus—Israel's deliverance (freedom) from Egypt when Moses was their leader.

22. wilderness—a dry and empty land in which few people live.

fight their battles and to win. But when the Israelites depended on their own strength, they failed hopelessly.

After the death of Joshua, parts of the Promised Land were still controlled by the people of Canaan (Judges 1:27, 28). It seems that the faith of the Israelites grew smaller when their focus changed. Instead of focusing on bringing the whole Promised Land under their control with God's help, they became more interested in earning a living. They lost the larger vision that God had for Israel as a people. Many Bible thinkers call the following centuries²³ the "dark ages" of Israel.

Read Judges 17:6. What kind of moral picture does this verse paint in our minds?

When we forget what God has in mind for us, things that are not important seem more important than they truly are. Israel lost its vision as a nation. For many people being loyal to their tribe became more important than being loyal to the nation. This is known as tribalism.²⁴ The book of Judges tells us that the different tribes and families were ready and willing to fight one another. People practiced religion the way they wanted. They became like the nations around them. This compromise²⁵ was caused by intermarriage with the people of Canaan, who were still living in the land (Judges 3:3–7). Israel's spiritual

downfall followed soon after. They fell under the power of foreign nations. In time God would set them free. But they soon would fall back into worshiping idols (false gods). Once they turned away from serving God, the people would fall under the control of foreign nations again. These same things kept happening over and over.

What is so dangerous about compromise is that it comes quietly, slowly, and almost without our knowing it. How differently do you live now than a few years ago? Might some of these changes come from compromise?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 29

OF KINGS AND PRINCES (1 Samuel 8:7–20)

The people of Israel were given so much by God. And God promised them even more if they would obey. But they fell under the negative influences²⁶ of the people around them. For example, the Israelites notice that the neighboring kingdoms have a very different setup for government than they do. All of these nations have a king. Israel has only judges. The leaders of Israelite tribes feel that it is time to choose a king over Israel (1 Samuel 8:4, 5). Samuel is not happy with this decision (choice).

23. centuries—periods of time that last 100 years each.

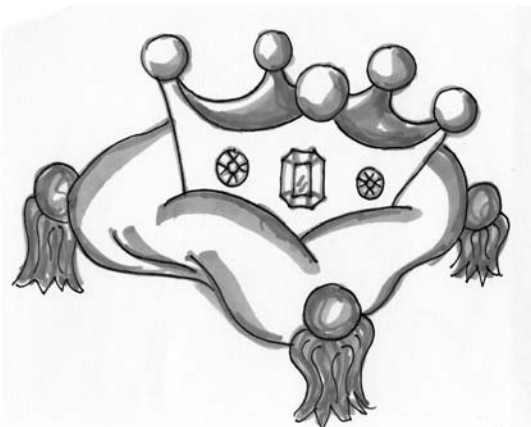
24. tribalism—being loyal to a tribe or other social group, especially when combined with strong negative feelings for people outside the group.

25. compromise—a change that makes something worse and that is not done for a good reason.

26. influences—people or things that have the power to change or affect others.

But God tells Samuel to do what the people want (1 Samuel 8:7).

Saul of the tribe of Benjamin is chosen as king by Samuel (1 Samuel 10:1). Saul begins his rule in Gibea. But as God already knows, things are not easy for the new king. Quarrels²⁷ between tribes continue. Israel's ability to continue as a kingdom is in danger because of pressure from the nations around it. The new king is not faithful to God. He does not follow God's will (plan) (1 Samuel 15:3, 8, 9). As a result, God finally refuses to accept Saul.



God was Israel's king, but Israel wanted to choose its own king.

Afterward, David is chosen as the future king of Israel. But Saul does not want to give up his throne to David. The next 10 years are filled with struggles. And David is always on the run.

The next big change in the history of Israel comes when Saul and his sons are killed in battle against the Philistines (1 Samuel 31:1–6). David first is made king over Judah and then, 7 years later,

over all of Israel. David establishes Jerusalem as the new capital of the united²⁸ kingdom. David's wars against the enemies of Israel are successful. David also makes the kingdom larger. After ruling for 45 years, David dies in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:4; 1 Kings 2:10, 11). Much like our own lives, David's time as king is filled with great victories, some bad choices, and a lot of God's grace.²⁹ He is followed by his son Solomon, who rules for 40 years (1 Kings 11:42).

Solomon is not a warrior or a mighty hero. Instead, he asks for, and receives, God's wisdom (1 Kings 3:3–13). Solomon builds the Lord's temple (house of God) in Jerusalem. He creates and sets up a strong government in Israel. But toward the end of his life, Solomon turns away from the Lord, following the religious practices of his many wives (1 Kings 11:1–8).

Read 1 Samuel 8:7–20. How do these verses show that the ways of God are better than the ways of humans? How often do we find ourselves doing the same thing as the Israelites do here, such as doing things our own way instead of God's?

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 30

REHOBOAM'S FOOLISHNESS (1 Kings 12:1–16)

The death of Solomon marks another

27. quarrels—arguments that occur when people cannot agree on something.

28. united—joined together as one.

29. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

important change in the history of Israel. Rehoboam was a very different king from his father Solomon. He ruled with an iron (harsh) hand. He made strict labor laws. And he experimented with allowing many different religions to be practiced in the land. All this led to great struggles when he began to rule Israel.

Read 1 Kings 12:1–16. Try to put yourself in Rehoboam’s situation in 1 Kings 12:1–16. When we study Rehoboam’s leadership, what can we learn from this story about our own attitudes (thoughts and feelings) toward the power we have and the power others have over us in different life situations? What can we learn from his mistake?



Rehoboam ruled with an iron (harsh) hand.

In King Rehoboam’s time, Judah and Israel were divided into two kingdoms. God’s once-united people

began to go different ways. But the center of worship and sacrifice³⁰ was still located in Judah. So, King Jeroboam I of Israel made two golden calves (1 Kings 12:26–29). He set up two places of worship with altars³¹—one in Bethel and the other in Dan. Things did not seem promising for Israel. The Israelites experienced ups and downs through their history during the next 200 years. Some kings halfheartedly followed God’s call to repentance.³² Other kings were more stubborn. They refused to listen to the prophets. Kings changed, and many of them were assassinated (murdered). A total of 20 kings ruled over Israel in Samaria from the time of Jeroboam I to Hoshea. Finally, in 722 B.C., Samaria was captured by the Assyrians, and the people of Israel were carried away as slaves.

On the southern side of the border, things did not go much better for the kingdom of Judah. David’s kingdom continued, but not all of his children shared his faith. Some kings, such as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, tried to return to the Lord. They also tried to bring Judah as a whole to repentance. The prophets helped these kings to correct many of the problems the country faced.

Unfortunately, the best efforts of the good kings and prophets were not enough. In 586 B.C. the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and took the leaders and many of the people to Babylon. Finally, the Babylonians

30. sacrifice—gift or offering given to God.

31. altars—a raised place on which sacrifices and gifts are offered.

32. repentance—the act of feeling sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

destroyed the temple. The time of the kings had come to an end.

One would think that the fall of Jerusalem and the enslavement³³ of the people would mean the end of the Jewish people. But they were allowed to return to their homeland many years later. What does this tell us about God’s patience and grace? In what ways have you felt that same patience and grace in your own life? How should you respond (answer) to this grace?

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 1

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The Lord calls upon all to study the first five books of sacred history. Moses wrote them under the inspired leading of the Holy Spirit. The first family put on the earth is an example of all families that will live until the close of time. There is much to study in this history that will help us understand God’s plan for the human race.³⁴ This plan is so clearly explained that the prayerful, faithful believer will become a learner of the thought and purpose of God from the beginning until the close of this earth’s history. The believer also will understand that Jesus Christ, one with the Father, was the great mover in all history. Jesus is the One who is responsible for making humans pure and noble.”—Adapted

from Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 3, page 184.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① God’s actions in history are a very important part of understanding the Bible. Read Daniel 2:21. What do these verses say about the relationship between God and human history? Why is this so important for us, especially when we are living near the true “end of history”?
- ② Why do we like stories so much? What makes a good story? How can stories be good tools in teaching truth? Who are some of your favorite storytellers, and why do you like them?
- ③ The ancient³⁵ Israelites had been called to be witnesses³⁶ to the whole world. They were chosen to show who God was and to share His message about salvation by grace³⁷ for everyone. But fighting between tribes weakened ancient Israel. What lessons can we learn from that tragic (sad) historical truth for ourselves today?
- ④ Background is so important for understanding any situation. But in most cases, there is a lot of background information that we do not know about. Because so much is hidden from us, why is it so important for us not to judge others?

33. enslavement—the act of putting people into slavery.

34. human race—all people; human beings (men, women, and children) as a group.

35. ancient—of, coming from, or belonging to a time that was long ago.

36. witnesses—people who show others who God is by living a Christian life.

37. salvation by grace—God’s plan for saving us from sin. It is a free gift to us from God. To accept it, all we must do is believe that He saves us.