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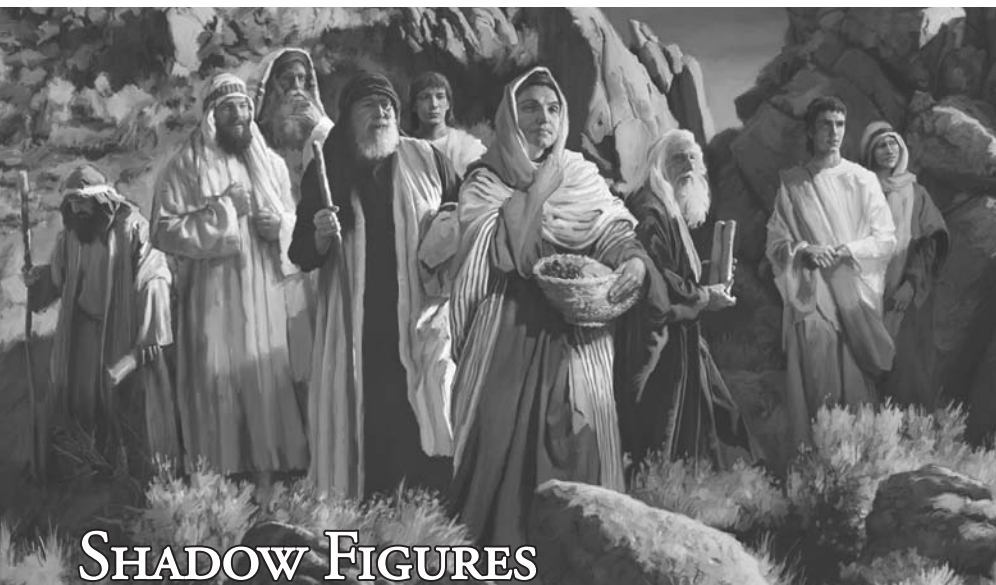
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## SHADOW FIGURES

**H**istory, secular or sacred, is not told in terms of statistics, programmatic statements, tables, or figures. It often is told through stories. Jesus Himself was a storyteller, and He told them with great power too (*Matt. 7:28; 13:3*).

This quarter's lessons all are about stories but not always the common and well-known ones with the "stars," such as Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, Daniel in the lions' den, or David and Goliath. We will look, instead, at characters who did not make the headlines but who existed in the background, the ones easily overlooked and forgotten.

Our focus this quarter will be on background characters in the Old Testament. Some are the good guys of the story, some are not. Though not much is written about them, enough is written that the careful reader can learn from these characters—which include women, power brokers, servants, and royalty.

In their stories, the challenges that confront these characters are not very different, in principle, from the challenges that we face today. However different their culture and background from ours, they, too, felt the pain of living in a sin-stained world, a world struggling amid the great controversy between good and evil. What makes this battle even more difficult is that it's not always easy to discern just what is the good and what is the evil, for sometimes the line between them can appear blurry.

Often, in the context of the big picture, the lives of these background characters

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might not seem so important. This is a feeling that many of us can identify with. How easy to think: *After all, in the scheme of things, what do any of us, as individuals, matter?* In the end, however, these “minor” characters made it into God’s master story, and from their stories we can learn things that can help us write a different and better story for ourselves.

Of course, it is not always easy to pay attention to the supporting cast. Instinctively, when we read or listen to a story, we tend to follow the main storyline and focus on the main characters. That’s common and understandable, which is why this quarter we are going to look at the so-called little people and thus get a fuller understanding of the biblical text.

Unfortunately, in our contemporary world, we are beginning to lose our capacity to listen carefully: too much action on the screen, too many quick cuts in the video clip, too much noise from the radio. We miss so much. Through focusing on the shadow characters of the Old Testament, we will read Scripture afresh, looking beyond the obvious to discover the joy of learning new truths from God’s Word.

Finally, as we look over the shoulders of the biblical authors and at the supporting cast, it is good to remember the power of our own lives and examples. More than anything else, people in the twenty-first century want to see something work before they consider all the intricate ins and outs of a particular cause. Our neighbors, our friends, and our family first want to see our personal story before they are ready to listen to our testimony and to biblical doctrines and beliefs.

In this sense, our stories can become powerful tools in our witness to others about what God has done for us. As with these background figures, we can become part of the great story of salvation, even if we might not be the main characters in the grander scheme of the cosmic drama that unfolds around us.

*Gerald and Chantal Klingbeil, together with their three daughters, Hannah, Sarah, and Jemima, have lived in Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. Currently Gerald Klingbeil is an associate editor of the Adventist Review.*

*Through focusing on the shadow characters of the Old Testament, we will read Scripture afresh, looking beyond the obvious to discover the joy of learning new truths from God’s Word.*

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A production of the Office of the President and the Communication Department of the Seventh-day Adventist World Church.

On a good day life in Haiti is hard. In this, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, the majority of people live below the poverty level.

But when the 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit the island nation last January, it destroyed homes and churches, schools and hospitals. Thousands died, including hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists. Aid agencies, including ADRA International® rushed needed aid to the island nation, aid that meant the difference between life and death.

Now it's our turn to help our brothers and sisters in Haiti—all 300,000 of them—start rebuilding their lives and their faith. In an unprecedented move, the General Conference and the Inter-American Division have chosen to use this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Special Project Offering to help rebuild the Adventist Church in some of the hardest hit areas of Haiti.

I'm glad my church cares. I'm glad I can help. For me it's personal.



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