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SHADOW FIGURES

History, 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*).

All of this quarter's lessons are about stories but not always the common and well-known ones with such "stars" 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 so good. 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 to be blurry.

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

might not seem so important. This is a feeling with which many of us can identify. 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 to 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 story line and focus on the main characters. That’s common and understandable, which is why this quarter we are going to look at the “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.

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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, South America, Europe, and Asia. Currently, Gerald Klingbeil is an associate editor of the Adventist Review®.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.