

Worldwide Rebellion¹ and the Patriarchs²



SABBATH—JANUARY 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 4:1–15; Genesis 3:9, 10; Genesis 4:9; Genesis 6:1–13; Psalm 51:1; Genesis 22:1–19; Genesis 28:12–15.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I am with you. I will watch over you everywhere you go. And I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you’ ” (Genesis 28:15, NIV)

THE STORIES THAT FOLLOW THE FALL ARE FILLED WITH TRICKERY (LYING AND FOOLING OTHERS) AND BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS. During this time the controversy (war between Christ and Satan) spreads around the world.

In the story of Cain and Abel, worship becomes the starting point for rebellion and death, which happens again and again throughout history.

The story of the Flood teaches us how rebellion and sin cause everything that God created to fall apart. Sin both spoils and destroys creation.

Abraham's experience shines like a bright ray of hope in what is otherwise a dark war against God. In Abraham's story, God shows His willingness to take the results of rebellion upon Himself. He would become our Substitute.

Then in the stories of Jacob and Esau and of Joseph and his brothers, we find that broken relationships continue to be the tools that Satan uses to destroy families and people groups.

But, through it all, the faithfulness of God continues as He supports and encourages His suffering children.

DEFINITIONS

1. rebellion—war against God.
2. patriarchs—forefathers and leaders in the early times of the Old Testament.

CAIN AND ABEL (Genesis 4:1–15)

Read Genesis 4:1–15. What do these verses tell us about how deeply rooted sin became?

At the birth of Cain, Eve was thrilled. She fully believed that she had just given birth to the Savior promised in Genesis 3:15. “I have acquired [received] a man from the LORD” (Genesis 4:1, NKJV). The verse could be translated as, “I have made a man—the Lord.” It simply reveals that Eve thought she had given birth to the One (Jesus) whom the Lord had promised would save humans from sin (Genesis 3:15).

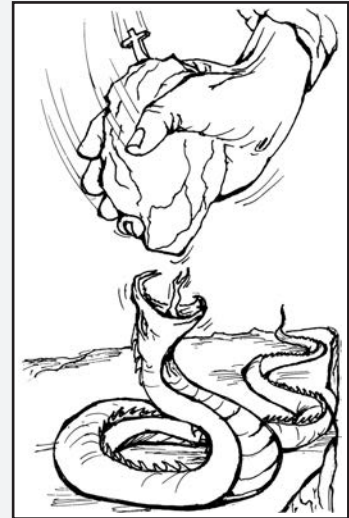
Nothing is said about the joy of Cain’s boyhood years or about how Adam and Eve, as new parents, proudly enjoyed the growth of their first baby. The story jumps quickly to a second birth and then to the two young men worshipping. But, as we so often read in the Bible, disagreement over worship leads to sad events.

Read Genesis 3:9, 10 and Genesis 4:9. Compare³ Adam’s thoughts and feelings with Cain’s thoughts and feelings when God questioned them after each one sinned. What is almost the same? What is different?

Note the differences in the feelings of Adam as compared with Cain. Adam appears confused, frightened, and ashamed (Genesis 3:10). But Cain is angry (Genesis 4:5), negative, and rebellious (fighting against God) (Genesis 4:9). Instead of offering a weak excuse as Adam did, Cain tells a bold lie.

But out of this sad event with Cain came some hope. With the birth of Seth, Eve again thinks she has given birth to the Promised One (Genesis 4:25). The name “Seth” is from the word that means “to place or to put.” The same word is used in Genesis 3:15 for a Savior who would be put in place to challenge the serpent and crush its head. In addition, Eve describes her new son as “the seed” to replace Abel. So much pain and suffering happened as the great controversy between good and evil continued to spread. But people still held on to the hope of being saved. Without it, what do we have?

Imagine the sadness Adam and Eve felt over the death of their son. The death itself would have been bad enough if not for the fact that another son had killed him. So, they lost two sons. How can we learn the hard lesson that sin carries far worse results than just the sin itself?



The Savior would crush the head of the serpent.

DEFINITIONS

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

THE FLOOD (Genesis 6:1–13)

Read Genesis 6:1–13. In what ways do we find the great controversy (war) between good and evil here, only now even much worse than before?

In the Flood, we find that some of the special acts of Creation go back to what they were before they were created. For example, many of those things that God had separated are now brought back together. The waters above and the waters below, the sea and the dry land, the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all living creatures that moved on the earth. They all are coming together. The earth seems to move back toward being “formless and empty” (Genesis 1:2, NIV).

The forces of evil seem to win. But God’s creative genius is still at work. He starts a new creation by again separating different things. First, He separates Noah (a good and blameless man) from the people of the time. Their wicked ways are great, and their thoughts are evil, immoral (sinful), and warlike (compare Genesis 6:8, 9 and Genesis 6:5, 11–13). God then makes Noah responsible for building a big boat. God then separates out a small group of people, birds, and animals. He puts them in the safety of the boat so that they can survive the Flood. Based on the grace (goodness and mercy) of God, life will go on, and a new world will arise out of the old. There is a new creation.

But it is not a perfect one. Sometime after the Flood, as Noah and his family are getting themselves established again, we are reminded of how weak humans are. Noah becomes drunk, and shameful things happen as a result (Genesis 9:20–27). So, even one of the heroes of faith (read Hebrews 11:7) had his bad moments. The great controversy continues all around the world and also in the hearts of people.

The Bible describes the Flood as blotting out (destroying; removing) all life on earth (Genesis 7:4, ESV) except for what is in the boat. Almost the same wording is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe the actions of the Savior in blotting out or forgiving sin (Isaiah 25:8; Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 51:1). Either our life is blotted out (destroyed by sin), or our sins are blotted out (forgiven and destroyed by God). How does this fact teach us just how black and white the issues really are?



God separates a small group of people and animals and puts them on a boat so they could survive the Flood.

ABRAHAM (Genesis 22:1–19)

Abraham (first called Abram) is known for his faithfulness. But his life experiences are more about God's faithfulness to him.

Twice God has promised Abraham that he would have a son. He first told him this news when Abraham was about 75 years old (Genesis 12:2, 4). Then about ten years later (Genesis 13:16), God told him again.

Eventually, even after much stumbling on Abraham's part, the child of promise—the child of the covenant—was born. And God's faithfulness to Abraham was finally shown (read Genesis 17:19, 21; Genesis 21:3–5).

Read Genesis 22:1–19. What hope is shown here about the whole great controversy?

“God commanded Abraham to sacrifice [kill] his son. This was to make a strong impression on his mind about the gospel and to test his faith. The pain which Abraham suffered during the dark days of that fearful test was permitted so that he might understand from his own experience about how great God's sacrifice was for man's salvation. No other test could have caused Abraham such suffering of soul as did the offering of his son. God gave His Son to a death of pain, suffering, and shame. The angels who witnessed the great soul suffering of the Son of God were not permitted to step in and stop Jesus' death, as they did for Isaac. There was no voice to cry, 'It is enough.' . . .

“The sacrifice required of Abraham was not for his own good alone or only for the benefit of future generations. Instead, it was also for the instruction of the sinless peoples of heaven and of other worlds. The controversy between Christ and Satan and the plan of salvation are the lesson book of the universe. Abraham had shown a lack of faith in God's promises. So Satan accused [blamed] Abraham in front of the angels and God for having failed to follow the conditions of the agreement between himself and God. That meant Abraham would be unworthy of the blessings of the agreement. But God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant [Abraham] before all heaven. God also wanted to teach us that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to make His plan of salvation clear.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, pages 154, 155.



Abraham's suffering over his test with Isaac was meant to help him understand how great God's sacrifice was for humankind's salvation.

JACOB AND ESAU (Genesis 28:12–15)



God wrestled with Jacob and crippled him.

The struggle between God's purposes and man's rebellion against His plans continue in the story of Jacob and Esau. It was a custom in Bible times for the firstborn son to receive the father's blessing (the birthright) before the death of the father. This included most of the family's wealth. So, the eldest son became responsible for the family's welfare.

Esau hated his brother Jacob for tricking him out of that great honor. And he planned to kill Jacob after their father died (Genesis 27:41). Rebekah sent Jacob away to a safe place. She thought all would be well again after a few days (Genesis 27:43, 44). A few days turned out to be 20 years, and Rebekah never saw Jacob again.

Read Genesis 28:12–15. What great hope was found in Jacob's dream?

By repeating the promises made to Abraham, God was telling Jacob that He would still keep the promise He made to Abraham and Isaac. True, Jacob's actions seemed to go against God's plan. But God was still there for him. Still, Jacob had to suffer 20 years of being tricked by his father-in-law: first in his marriage, and then in his wages (Genesis 29:20, 23, 25, 27; Genesis 31:7). In a strange twist, all those years serving for his wife seemed like just a few days. Those "few days" were the same length of time Rebekah thought Jacob would be away from her (Genesis 29:20).

When Jacob decided to go back home, first Laban chased after him (Genesis 31:25, 26). Then Esau set out with 400 men to meet him. Both of those situations were threats to Jacob's life. And God had to step in twice to save him; first in a dream to Laban, to tell him not to harm Jacob (Genesis 31:24). Then God wrestled with Jacob in person and crippled him (Genesis 32:24–30). The sight of Jacob hobbling with a walking stick could have impressed Esau that Jacob was no threat. Jacob sent gifts out ahead and spoke very wisely and carefully to Esau. His words and gifts all seemed enough to heal the break between the two brothers. The last we read of them together is when they bury their father (Genesis 35:29). So, any plan Esau had of killing Jacob after the funeral was now forgotten.

Look at all the pain and suffering that foolish choices brought to these people, both to the innocent and to the guilty. How can we learn to *think, think, think* before we act?

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS (Genesis 45:4–11)

Jacob deserved a lot worse from his brother Esau after the way Jacob tricked him. We also find trickery in the story of Joseph and his brothers.

Here again, we find brother hating brother because one received more favor than the other (Genesis 37:3, 4). The robe of many colors was not just made from a striped bed sheet. The language in the Bible suggested that it was an expensive robe worn by kings. And it would have been covered with rich designs and colorful needlework. This robe would have taken up to a year to make.

Then, when Joseph told his brothers about his dreams (Genesis 37:5–11), he caused even more hate and jealousy against himself. So, at the first chance, the brothers planned to get rid of him (Genesis 37:19, 20). The brothers must have congratulated themselves on how easy it was to remove him from their lives. But none of them had any idea how God would use this situation to save them years later.

Read Genesis 45:4–11. What was the bigger picture that Joseph saw? What was his main goal?

Think of what might have gone through Joseph's mind as a boy in chains. He was walking behind a camel and looking toward the hills of his boyhood home as they disappeared into the distance. When Joseph was on the slavery auction block, nosy buyers made him feel low by poking and inspecting him very closely before bidding for him. Many have given up their faith for less suffering than this.

Joseph could have chosen to become bitter and to turn against God. But he chose instead to keep his faith strong during this terrible experience. The great controversy was going on in his own life in a dramatic way. Joseph soon adjusted to the household of one of the most important military men in the country. Under the blessing of God, Joseph gained his master's trust (Genesis 39:1–4). Later still, the slave became a leader in Egypt.

Abraham's line—Isaac, Jacob, and his sons—all suffered from the same family problem: trickery and lying. In Joseph's story, lying had terrible and evil results. But it had a happy ending. How do you keep your faith strong and have a positive attitude (feeling) when things do not seem to be turning out as well as they did for Joseph?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: No question, as these stories tell us, life on this earth is not so smooth as we would like it to be during the great controversy. For example, when Adam and Eve held their newborns in their arms, they would not have dreamed that one would kill the other. When she married Moses, Zipporah certainly did not dream the future would turn out the way it did. And do you think Leah's married life was what she, as a very young girl, had dreamed about? And youthful Jeremiah did not expect to be attacked and called a traitor by his own nation. And would David and Bathsheba not have wished for a different story than the one that really happened? What about Jesus? Of course, Jesus came to earth to die. That was the whole point. But look at Jesus' human side, the side born out of the same clay as us. It was the same side that cried out in Gethsemane, " 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me' " (Matthew 26:39, ESV). Soon He would be beaten, mocked, and crucified (put to death on a cross) at the age of 33. It surely was not what anyone would have hoped for. No question, life can, and does, do us wrong. But it should not be surprising, should it? What do you expect in a fallen, sinful world? Heaven? Eden is long gone. But it will be back. When it is, the separation between what our lives are now, and what they will be like then, will be much greater than the gap between what we had hoped for but what we got instead.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In Scripture, what are the important differences between brothers who kept faith in God and those who did not?
- ② When quarrels and jealousies among brothers or sisters seem to overpower God's purposes for families today, how is it possible for them to find a positive tomorrow? What can be done for the families of your church to help them find God's bigger purpose for them?
- ③ What can be done for the people in your church group who feel that they are alone in the world and that their lives are meaningless and useless?
- ④ Even if your life is not turning out as you had hoped, how can the promise of eternal life help to keep the disappointment from getting you down?