

Global Rebellion *and the Patriarchs*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 4:1–15; Gen. 3:9, 10; Gen. 4:9; Gen. 6:1–13; Ps. 51:1; Genesis 22:1–19; Gen. 28:12–15.*

Memory Text: “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you” (*Genesis 28:15, NKJV*).

The stories that follow the Fall take the themes of deception and broken relationships, first seen in Eden, to a deeper level. During this time, the conflict spreads and diversifies over the globe.

In the story of Cain and Abel, worship becomes the catalyst for discord and death, a recurring theme throughout history.

The story of the Flood reveals how rebellion and sin cause the unraveling of everything that God created. Sin not only distorts creation, it destroys it.

Abraham's experience is a major encouragement in the conflict, with God demonstrating His willingness to take the consequences of rebellion upon Himself. He would become our Substitute.

Then in the stories of Jacob and Esau and Joseph and his brothers, we see the continuing interplay of fractured relationships being the means that Satan uses to destroy families and people groups.

Yet through it all, the faithfulness of God, as He sustains and nurtures His harassed children, continues.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 16.

Cain and Abel

Read Genesis 4:1–15. What does this tell us about how deeply ingrained sin had become?

At the birth of Cain, Eve was ecstatic. She fully believed that she had just given birth to the Deliverer promised in Genesis 3:15. “I have acquired a man from the LORD” (*Gen. 4:1, NKJV*). The text, translated literally could read, “I have made a man—the Lord.” At its basic level, it simply reveals that Eve thought she had delivered the One whom the Lord had promised (*Gen. 3:15*).

Nothing is said of the joy of Cain’s boyhood years and the novelty of new parents proudly enjoying the development of their first baby. The narrative jumps quickly to a second birth and then to the two young men worshipping. However, as we so often see, differences over worship lead to tragedy.

Read Genesis 3:9, 10; 4:9. Compare Adam’s reaction with Cain’s reaction when God questioned them after each one sinned. What is similar? What is different?

Note the differences in Adam’s emotions as compared with Cain’s. Adam appears confused, frightened, and ashamed (*Gen. 3:10*), but Cain is angry (*Gen. 4:5*), cynical, and rebellious (*Gen. 4:9*). Instead of offering a weak excuse as Adam did, Cain tells a blatant untruth.

However, out of the despair came a measure of hope and optimism. With the birth of Seth, Eve again thinks she has delivered the Promised One (*Gen. 4:25*). The name “Seth” is from the word that means “to place or to put,” the same word used in Genesis 3:15 for a Deliverer who would be put in place to challenge the serpent and crush its head. In a further parallel to Genesis 3:15, Eve describes her new son as “the seed” to replace Abel. Thus, even amid so much despair and tragedy, and as the great controversy between good and evil continued to spread, people still clung to the hope of redemption. Without it, what do we have?

Imagine the woe of Adam and Eve over the death of their son, which would have been bad enough if not for the fact that another son had killed him. Thus, they lost two sons. How can we learn the hard lesson that sin has consequences far beyond the immediate sin itself?

The Flood

Read Genesis 6:1–13. In what ways do we see the great controversy between good and evil expressed here, only now even more intensely than before?

In the Flood we see a partial reversal of the special acts of Creation; 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, all coming together. The earth seems to move back toward being “formless and empty” (*Gen. 1:2, NIV*).

Despite this apparent win by the forces of evil, God’s creative genius is still at work. He initiates a new creation, by again separating different elements. First, He separates Noah (a just and blameless man) from the people of the time, whose wickedness is great and whose every thought is evil, corrupt, and violent (*compare Gen. 6:8, 9 and Gen. 6:5, 11–13*). God then tasks Noah with building an enormous boat. He then separates out a small group of people, birds, and animals—and puts them in the safety of the boat so that they could survive what is coming. Based on the grace of God, life will go on, and a new world will arise out of the dregs of the old. There is a new creation.

But it’s hardly a perfect one. Some time after the Flood, as Noah and his family are getting themselves established again, we are reminded of the frailty of human goodness. Noah becomes drunk, and shameful things occur (*Gen. 9:20–27*). Thus, even one of the heroes of faith (*see Heb. 11:7*) had his bad moments. The great controversy continues, not only on a massive scale but also in the hearts of individuals.

The Bible describes the Flood as blotting out all life (*Gen. 7:4, ESV*). A similar expression is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe the actions of the Redeemer in forgiving sin (*Isa. 25:8, 43:25, Ps. 51:1*). Either our life is blotted out, or our sins are. How does this stark reality show just how black-and-white the issues really are?

Abraham

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

Twice God has assured Abraham that he would have a son. He first told him when Abraham was about 75 years old (*Gen. 12:2, 4*), then about ten years later (*Gen. 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 His sometimes-wavering servant was revealed (*see Gen. 17:19, 21; Gen. 21:3–5*).

Read Genesis 22:1–19. What hope is revealed here in regard to the whole great controversy?

“It was to impress Abraham's mind with the reality of the gospel, as well as to test his faith, that God commanded him to slay his son. The agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man's redemption. No other test could have caused Abraham such torture of soul as did the offering of his son. God gave His Son to a death of agony and shame. The angels who witnessed the humiliation and soul anguish of the Son of God were not permitted to interpose, as in the case of Isaac. There was no voice to cry, 'It is enough.' To save the fallen race, the King of glory yielded up His life. What stronger proof can be given of the infinite compassion and love of God? 'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' Romans 8:32.

“The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds. The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan—the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out—is the lesson book of the universe. Because Abraham had shown a lack of faith in God's promises, Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings. God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 154, 155.

Jacob and Esau

The struggle between God's purposes and individual rebellion makes further progress in the story of Jacob and Esau. It was customary in antiquity for the firstborn son to receive the father's blessing (the birth-right) before the death of the father. This included most of the family's wealth; thus, the eldest son became responsible for the family's welfare.

Esau hated his brother Jacob after being tricked out of that great honor, and he planned to kill him after their father died (*Gen. 27:41*). Rebekah sent Jacob away for safekeeping, thinking all would be well again after a few days (*Gen. 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 assuring Jacob that plans were on track. Even though Jacob's actions seemed to ignore God's plan, God was still there for him. However, Jacob had to endure 20 years of being tricked by his father-in-law, first in his marriage, then in his wages (*Gen. 29:20, 23, 25, 27; 31:7*). Yet, in a strange twist, all those years serving for his wife seemed like just a few days, the time Rebekah thought Jacob would be away from her (*Gen. 29:20*).

When Jacob decided to go back home, first Laban pursued him (*Gen. 31:25, 26*), and then Esau set out with 400 men to meet him. Both of those situations were life threatening, and God had to step in twice to deliver him; first in a dream to Laban, to tell him not to harm Jacob (*Gen. 31:24*); then in person, to wrestle with Jacob and cripple him (*Gen. 32:24–30*). The sight of Jacob hobbling with a walking stick could have impressed Esau that Jacob posed no threat. The gifts were sent on ahead and, together with the careful way Jacob spoke, it all seemed enough to heal the break between the two brothers. The last we see of them together is when they bury their father (*Gen. 35:29*); thus, any previous plan Esau had of killing Jacob after the funeral was now forgotten.

Look at all the pain and suffering these 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

Just as Jacob deserved a lot worse from his brother Esau after the way he treated him, we see something similar in the story of Joseph and his brothers.

Here, again, we see brother hating brother because of one being shown favor over the other (*Gen. 37:3, 4*). The tunic of many colors was not just made from a striped bed sheet. The original word implies that it was an expensive robe worn by royalty and would have been covered with rich embroidery and colorful needlework, taking up to a year to make.

Then, when Joseph told his brothers about his dreams (*Gen. 37: 5–11*), he incited even more hatred and envy against himself. So, at the first opportunity, they plotted to get rid of him (*Gen. 37:19, 20*). The brothers must have congratulated themselves on how easy it was to remove him from their lives. None, though, 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 focus?

Think of what might have gone through Joseph's mind as a boy in chains, walking behind a camel and looking toward the hills of his boyhood home as they disappeared into the distance. Then being put on the auction block and having inquisitive buyers prodding him and humiliating him in their close inspection before bidding for him. Many have given up their faith for less humiliation and suffering than this.

Joseph could have chosen to become bitter and anti-God, but he chose instead to maintain his faith amid this harrowing struggle, the great controversy being played out in his own life in a dramatic way. He soon adjusted to the household of one of the most important military men in the country, and under the blessing of God he soon gained his trust (*Gen. 39:1–4*). Eventually, the slave became a leader in Egypt.

Despite the incredible family dysfunction revealed in this story, despite the treachery and evil, it had a happy ending. How, though, do you keep your faith intact and have a gracious attitude when things don't seem to be turning out as well as they did for Joseph?

Further Thought: No question, as these stories show, life on this earth, amid the great controversy, doesn't always play out as we might have wanted. For instance, Adam and Eve would not have scripted, as they held their newborns in their arms, that one would kill the other. Zipporah, when she married Moses, certainly didn't have the future that she envisioned. And do you think Leah's married life was what she, as a very young girl, had dreamed about? And youthful Jeremiah—whatever his hopes and ambitions—they surely didn't include being railed against, castigated, and deemed a traitor by his own nation. And wouldn't David and Bathsheba have preferred a different narrative than the one that ultimately unfolded (no doubt Uriah would have)? What about Jesus? Of course, Jesus came to earth to die; that was the whole point. But from His human side, the side born out of the same clay as us, the side that cried out in Gethsemane, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me . . ." (*Matt. 26:39, ESV*)—getting beaten, scorned, mocked, and crucified at age 33 surely wasn't what anyone would have hoped for. No question, life can and does do us dirty. But it shouldn't be surprising, should it? What do you expect in a fallen, sinful world—paradise? Eden's long gone. But it will be back, and when it is, the gap between what our lives are now and what they will be like then will be infinitely greater than the gap between what we had hoped for but got instead.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are the significant differences between the siblings who maintained faith in God and those who did not see the need to?
- 2 When sibling rivalries and jealousies seem to overpower God's purposes for families today, how is it possible for them to see a positive tomorrow? What can be done for the families of your church to help them see God's bigger purpose for them?
- 3 What can be done for the people in your congregation who feel that they are alone in the world and that their lives are meaningless and of no value?
- 4 Even if your life isn't turning out as you had hoped, how can the promise of eternal life help keep the disappointment from overwhelming you?

A Dream Comes True: Part 2

The story thus far: Samantha is thrilled to be working in the Amazon jungle as a nurse on the Luzeiro mission boat and in a village clinic—offering the only medical assistance for thousands of people along the river. She often faces medical emergencies where she must depend fully upon God. One evening, a man arrived at the clinic holding his hand in bloodied bandages.

“What happened?” she asked the man.

“I was using a grinder,” he replied, “when my hand got caught in the blades.”

Samantha and her assistant, Gloria, carefully cleaned the hand, applied antibiotic ointment and rewrapped it tightly in clean bandages. As they prayed with the man, they knew that he needed a higher level of care than they were able to provide, and asked God for help.

A few minutes later, a mother, father, and ten-year-old son showed up in front of the clinic. The boy had been bitten on the foot by a *surucucu*, a venomous pit viper—one of the most poisonous snakes of the Amazon.

“How long ago was he bitten?” Samantha asked.

“About five hours ago,” came the reply.

Samantha was shocked. According to all the medical literature, the boy should have been dead long before now. Quickly, she provided emergency care, doing all she could to stop the spread of the poison.

The family had tried to treat the boy themselves, putting coffee on the bite wound and having their son eat the tail of the snake, thinking it would protect him. As he grew weaker, the parents decided to bring him to the clinic. Samantha knew that it was only through a miracle that the boy was alive, and to survive he would continue to need divine help. She also knew that both boy and man needed to be taken to the nearest hospital—an eight-hour trip using a regular boat, or two hours by ADRA’s fast boat—the *Jessie Halliwell*.

While the fast boat was clearly the best option, it also took the most fuel and would completely deplete the clinic’s reserve for the month. The fuel reserve had been saved for emergencies that might arise from a visiting group from the South American Division office who had come to make improvements to the clinic and village.

Knowing that two lives were in jeopardy, Herber Kalbermatter, the ADRA Brazil director for the Amazon region, approached the group, explaining the situation. Immediately they told him to use the fuel and that they would trust in God for protection.

It was dark and rainy by the time Samantha, her two patients, and the boy’s mother climbed into the *Jessie Halliwell* for a fast two-hour ride to the nearest hospital. Pelting down rain mixed with river spray as the little boat and its precious cargo sped down the river. Samantha did her best to care for her charges and continued to pray that God would intervene.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.