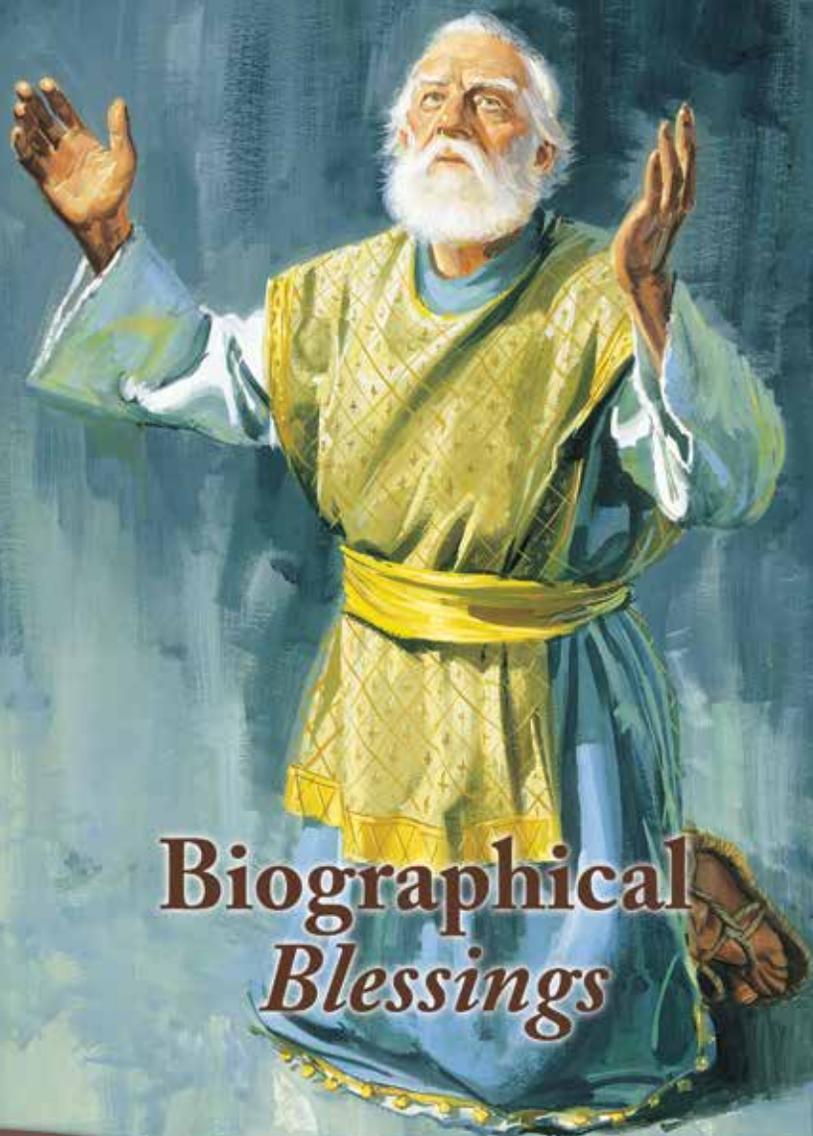


SABBATH BIBLE LESSONS

Senior Division



Biographical
Blessings

Vol. 94, No. 1

January–March, 2018

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Sabbath Bible Lessons, a daily study program, is based solely on the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy without additional comments. The quotations are as brief as possible to provide concise, direct thoughts. Brackets [] are supplied in some cases to ensure clarity, proper context, and smooth readability. Further study in the source materials is strongly recommended.

Illustrations: Good Salt on the front cover and Map Resources on pp. 4, 25, 46, 72.

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Foreword

“As an educator no part of the Bible is of greater value than are its biographies. These biographies differ from all others in that they are absolutely true to life. It is impossible for any finite mind to interpret rightly, in all things, the workings of another. None but He who reads the heart, who discerns the secret springs of motive and action, can with absolute truth delineate character, or give a faithful picture of a human life. In God’s word alone is found such delineation.

“No truth does the Bible more clearly teach than that what we do is the result of what we are. To a great degree the experiences of life are the fruition of our own thoughts and deeds.”—*Education*, p. 146.

In every period of human history, individual men and women have given their fellowmen great examples of nobility of character. Circumstances and conditions in society naturally change with the development of time, but no society could advance mentally, morally, or spiritually without intelligent, courageous, and self-denying demonstrations of how principle should be followed.

The inspired biographies of the Scriptures are unique in that they are true. When certain crises have arisen in the history of God’s people, loyal and dependable individuals have faithfully displayed qualities of fidelity and devotion to the cause of God that have many times brought the people back to God.

“Had our good Bible been written by uninspired persons, it would have presented quite a different appearance and would have been a discouraging study to erring mortals, who are contending with natural frailties and the temptations of a wily foe. But as it is, we have a correct record of the religious experiences of marked characters in Bible history.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 10.

The early centuries of God’s faithful people on this earth provide rich insights for our growth in grace and the knowledge of God. These various biographies are highly beneficial—and some of these are not expounded upon as frequently as others. For this reason, during the first quarter of this year, Sabbath school students around the world will have Biographical Blessings by focusing particularly on the experiences of Enoch, Job, Gideon, Hannah, Samson, and Samuel. We will seek to glean valuable lessons to strengthen our faith by observing God’s marvelous ways of operating among His children.

“We need just such lessons as the Bible gives us, for with the revelation of sin is recorded the retribution which follows. The sorrow and penitence of the guilty, and the wailing of the sin-sick soul, come to us from the past, telling us that man was then, as now, in need of the pardoning mercy of God. It teaches us that while He is a punisher of crime, He pities and forgives the repenting sinner.”—*Ibid.*, p. 12.

The General Conference Sabbath School Department

Church Building Project in Targu-Mures, Romania

Romania is a sovereign state located in Southeastern Europe. It borders the Black Sea, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Hungary, Serbia, and Moldova. It has an area of 238,391 km² (91,699 sq. miles) and a temperate-continental climate. With 19.94 million inhabitants, the country is the seventh most populous member state of the European Union. Its capital and largest city, Bucharest, is the sixth largest city in the European Union, with 1,883,425 inhabitants as of 2011.



An overwhelming majority of the population identify themselves as Christians. At the country's 2011 census, 81.0% of respondents identified as Orthodox Christians belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church. Other denominations include Protestantism (4.8%), Roman Catholicism (4.3%), and Greek Catholicism (0.8%).

About a hundred years ago, 16 members of the Adventist Church in Targu-Mures were disfellowshipped because of their position against war. This made Targu-Mures one of the pioneer cities on the map of the Reform Movement. The house of worship they bought in those times was later confiscated by the communists. Despite the severe persecution during the communist time, the brethren worshipped the Lord in private homes, paying heavy fines when caught by the secret police.

In the year 1990, after Romania became once again a free religious country, the brethren bought a house for worship. During the following years, besides the meetings of the local church, this house was utilized for many health lectures, nutrition seminars and cooking classes, with an average of 250 to 300 people reached at each of them.

Today, Targu-Mures continues as an important center of our church in the South Ardeal Field, in the central part of the Romanian Union. With more than 142,000 citizens, Targu-Mures is encompassed by many villages in which a good number of our church members live.

A new house of worship became a necessity. The brethren worked hard to realize that, and they reached to the level of building the roof. The resources though, are now exhausted. For this reason, your help will be very much appreciated!

May the Lord bless you richly as you consider a generous offering for this first Sabbath of the month and the new year.

Your brethren and sisters from the Romanian Union

A Candidate for Heaven

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5).

“How often those who trusted the word of God, though in themselves utterly helpless, have withstood the power of the whole world—Enoch, pure in heart, holy in life, holding fast his faith in the triumph of righteousness against a corrupt and scoffing generation.”—*Education*, p. 254.

Suggested Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 84–89.

Sunday

December 31

1. IN AN AGE OF MORAL CORRUPTION

- a. **What summarizes the experience of the seventh from Adam, and how did his environment compare with ours today? Genesis 5:18–22.**

“There never has been and never will be an age when the moral darkness will be so dense as when Enoch lived a life of irreproachable righteousness.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 1, p. 1088.

“Enoch had temptations as well as we. He was surrounded with society no more friendly to righteousness than is that which surrounds us. The atmosphere he breathed was tainted with sin and corruption, the same as ours; yet he lived a life of holiness.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 122.

“We should not, my brethren and sisters, float along with the popular current. Our present work is to come out from the world and be separate. This is the only way we can walk with God, as did Enoch.”—*Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 535.

“Enoch’s walk with God was not in a trance or a vision, but in all the duties of his daily life. He did not become a hermit, shutting himself entirely from the world; for he had, in the world, a work to do for God.”—*Ibid.*, vol. 8, pp. 329, 330.

2. A HEALTHY FEAR OF GOD

- a. What should inspire us about Enoch's experience with God? Genesis 5:23, 24.
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"The Lord loved Enoch because he steadfastly followed Him, and abhorred iniquity, and earnestly sought heavenly knowledge that he might do His will perfectly. He yearned to unite himself still more closely to God, whom he feared, revered, and adored. God would not permit Enoch to die as other men, but sent His angels to take him to Heaven without seeing death."—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 57.

"For three hundred years Enoch had been seeking purity of heart, that he might be in harmony with heaven. . . .

"To such communion God is calling us. As was Enoch's, so must be their holiness of character who shall be redeemed from among men at the Lord's second coming."—*Gospel Workers*, pp. 53, 54.

- b. What was shown to the first prophet in history, and why was he entrusted with such a vision? Jude 14, 15.
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"Enoch was the first prophet among mankind. . . . His life was a specimen of Christian consistency. Holy lips alone should speak forth the words of God in denunciation and judgments."—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 1, p. 1088.

- c. What types of behavior especially provoke God's wrath in the Christian era? Jude 5–8, 10, 11, 16; Matthew 11:20, 23, 24.
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"The fate of Sodom is a solemn admonition, not merely to those who are guilty of outbreking sin, but to all who are trifling with Heavenly light and privileges. . . .

"It will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for the cities of the plain than for those who have known the love of Christ, and yet have turned away to choose the pleasures of a world of sin."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 165.

3. KEEPING OUR PERSPECTIVE

- a. How did Enoch maintain his purity? 1 Corinthians 15:33; Titus 1:15, 16.
-

“[Enoch] did not make his abode with the wicked. He did not locate in Sodom, thinking to save Sodom. He placed himself and his family where the atmosphere would be as pure as possible. Then at times he went forth to the inhabitants of the world with his God-given message. Every visit he made to the world was painful to him. He saw and understood something of the leprosy of sin. After proclaiming his message, he always took back with him to his place of retirement some who had received the warning. Some of these became overcomers, and died before the Flood came. But some had lived so long in the corrupting influence of sin that they could not endure righteousness.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 1, pp. 1087, 1088.

“The greater and more pressing his labors, the more constant and earnest were [Enoch’s] prayers. He continued to exclude himself at certain periods from all society. After remaining for a time among the people, laboring to benefit them by instruction and example, he would withdraw, to spend a season in solitude, hungering and thirsting for that divine knowledge which God alone can impart.”—*Gospel Workers*, p. 52.

- b. What can we learn from Enoch’s attitude? Hebrews 11:5.
-

“The infinite, unfathomable love of God through Christ became the subject of [Enoch’s] meditations day and night. With all the fervor of his soul he sought to reveal that love to the people among whom he dwelt. . . .

“As the scenes of the future were opened to his view, Enoch became a preacher of righteousness, bearing God’s message to all who would hear the words of warning. . . .

“The power of God that wrought with His servant was felt by those who heard. Some gave heed to the warning and renounced their sins, but the multitudes mocked at the solemn message. The servants of God are to bear a similar message to the world in the last days, and it will also be received with unbelief and mockery.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 329, 330.

4. BECOMING CHRISTLIKE

- a. In what sense was Enoch's goal a model for us today? Galatians 6:8, 9.
-

"As year after year passed, deeper and deeper grew the tide of human guilt, darker and darker gathered the clouds of divine judgment. Yet Enoch, the witness of faith, held on his way, warning, pleading, and teaching, striving to turn back the tide of guilt and to stay the bolts of vengeance.

"The men of that generation mocked the folly of him who sought not to gather gold or silver, or to build up possessions here. But Enoch's heart was upon eternal treasures."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 330.

- b. What is to guide our daily decisions? 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hosea 14:9.
-

"The greater the existing iniquity, the more earnest was [Enoch's] longing for the home of God. While still on earth, he dwelt, by faith, in the realms of light."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 330, 331.

"Did he [Enoch] see God by his side? Only by faith. He knew that the Lord was there, and he adhered steadfastly to the principles of truth. We, too, are to walk with God. When we do this, our faces will be lighted up by the brightness of His presence, and when we meet one another, we shall speak of His power, saying, Praise God. Good is the Lord, and good is the word of the Lord.

"Those who will be translated at the close of time, will be those who commune with God on earth. Those who make manifest that their life is hid with Christ in God will ever be representing Him in all their life-practices. Selfishness will be cut out by the roots.

"Let us realize the weakness of humanity, and see where man fails in his self-sufficiency. We shall then be filled with a desire to be just what God desires us to be—pure, noble, sanctified. . . .

"To be like God will be the one desire of the soul.

"This is the desire that filled Enoch's heart. . . . He did not mark out his own course, or set up his own will, as if he thought himself fully qualified to manage matters. He strove to conform himself to the divine likeness."—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 1, p. 1087.

5. A PURIFYING PROCESS

- a. Describe the ultimate triumph of all who share Enoch's aim. Matthew 5:8.
-

“God has a heaven full of blessings that He wants to bestow on those who are earnestly seeking for that help which the Lord alone can give. It was in looking in faith to Jesus, in asking of Him, in believing that every word spoken would be verified, that Enoch walked with God. He kept close by the side of God, obeying His every word.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 1, p. 1087.

“How few are aware that they have darling idols, that they have cherished sins! God sees these sins to which you may be blinded, and He works with His pruning knife to strike deep and separate these cherished sins from you. You all want to choose for yourselves the process of purification. How hard it is for you to submit to the crucifixion of self; but when the work is all submitted to God, to Him who knows our weakness and our sinfulness, He takes the very best way to bring about the desired results. It was through constant conflict and simple faith that Enoch walked with God. You may all do the same. You may be thoroughly converted and transformed, and be indeed children of God, enjoying not only the knowledge of His will, but, by your example, leading others in the same path of humble obedience and consecration.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 543.

“[Enoch] lived in a corrupt age, when moral pollution was teeming all around him; yet he trained his mind to devotion, to love purity. His conversation was upon heavenly things. He educated his mind to run in this channel, and he bore the impress of the divine. His countenance was lighted up with the light which shineth in the face of Jesus.”—*Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 122.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What should we realize about Enoch's generation?
2. What are we to learn from the fate of Sodom?
3. Explain Enoch's policy about his environment.
4. With what purpose in mind did Enoch study God's word?
5. How is this week's lesson to bring us hope?

The Enigma of Trials

“He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

“The suffering soul is made patient, trustful, triumphant in God under adverse circumstances.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 355.

Suggested Readings: *Messages to Young People*, pp. 78-80, 94-98; *Early Writings*, pp. 46-48.

Sunday

January 7

1. AN INNOCENT TARGET

a. What is written about the character of Job? Job 1:1; 29:15; 31:6.

“Job did not neglect his duty to those outside of his household; he was benevolent, kind, thoughtful of the interest of others.”—*The Review and Herald*, August 30, 1881.

b. Explain the troublesome influences operating in this world, hidden behind the scenes—and why we need to be aware of them. Ephesians 6:12.

“From the days of Adam to our own time, our great enemy has been exercising his power to oppress and destroy. He is now preparing for his last campaign against the church. All who seek to follow Jesus will be brought into conflict with this relentless foe. The more nearly the Christian imitates the divine Pattern, the more surely will he make himself a mark for the attacks of Satan.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 510.

“If our eyes could be opened to see the good and evil agencies at work, there would be no trifling, no vanity, no jesting or joking.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 41.

2. PARENTAL VIGILANCE

- a. What serious warning should parents learn from Job's vigilance regarding the great controversy between good and evil? Job 1:4, 5.
-

"It were well for parents to learn from the man of Uz a lesson of steadfastness and devotion. Job . . . labored earnestly for the salvation of his own family. Amid the festivities of his sons and daughters, he trembled lest his children should displease God. As a faithful priest of the household, he offered sacrifices for them individually. He knew the offensive character of sin, and the thought that his children might forget the divine claims, led him to God as an intercessor in their behalf."—*The Review and Herald*, August 30, 1881.

"You roll vast responsibilities upon the preacher and hold him accountable for the souls of your children; but you do not sense your own responsibility as parents. . . . Your sons and daughters are corrupted by your own example and lax precepts; and, notwithstanding this lack of domestic training, you expect the minister to counteract your daily work and accomplish the wonderful achievement of training their hearts and lives to virtue and piety. After the minister has done all he can do for the church by faithful, affectionate admonition, patient discipline, and fervent prayer to reclaim and save the soul, yet is not successful, the fathers and mothers often blame him because their children are not converted, when it may be because of their own neglect. The burden rests with the parents; and will they take up the work that God has entrusted to them, and with fidelity perform it? Will they move onward and upward, working in a humble, patient, persevering way to reach the exalted standard themselves and to bring their children up with them?"—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 494, 495.

"It is the parents' work to give line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. Correct wrong tendencies, not in passion, but in love. The children may be saved if fathers and mothers will do their work faithfully. . . .

"We are teaching lessons to the children which we wish them to copy. If we wish our children to be chaste, pure-minded, and noble, we must be so ourselves. If we are impostors, professing to be children of God, while our impatience, fretfulness, and deception stamp us children of Satan, our children will be no better than we. All efforts of parents should be to go forward to perfection of Christian character."—*The Review and Herald*, April 14, 1885.

3. TRAGEDY STRIKES . . .

a. What incited the devil's wrath against Job? Job 1:6–11.

b. Despite Job's fidelity, what series of shocks soon came with regard to his earthly possessions and the temporal lives of his children? Job 1:12–19.

"All suffering is not the result of a perverted life. Job is brought before us as a man whom the Lord permitted Satan to afflict. The enemy stripped him of all he possessed; his family ties were broken; his children were taken from him."—*The Signs of the Times*, June 21, 1899.

c. What can we learn from how Job responded to these trials? Job 1:20–22.

"Christ is our Guide and Comforter, who comforts us in all our tribulations. When He gives us a bitter draught to drink, He also holds a cup of blessing to our lips. He fills the heart with submission, with joy and peace in believing, and enables us to say submissively, Not my will, but Thy will, O Lord, be done."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 270.

d. Even in the face of Satan's perverse accusations before the heavenly universe, why can we still have hope? Job 2:1–6.

"There is no power in the whole satanic force that can disable the soul that trusts, in simple confidence, in the wisdom that comes from God.

"Christ is our tower of strength, and Satan can have no power over the soul that walks with God in humility of mind. . . . In Christ there is perfect and complete help for every tempted soul. Dangers beset every path, but the whole universe of heaven is standing on guard, that none may be tempted above that which he is able to bear."—*My Life Today*, p. 316.

4. RESPONDING WITH FAITH AND WISDOM

- a. Explain the devil’s next attacks upon Job and how the faithful man of Uz responded. Job 2:8–10.

“Job was deprived of his worldly possessions and so afflicted in body that he was abhorred by his relatives and friends, yet he preserved his integrity and faithfulness to God.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 525.

- b. What reveals the tremendous depth of Job’s tragic situation? Job 2:11–13.

- c. What did Job realize about his predicament, and how does the apostle Peter echo these thoughts for our benefit? Job 23:8–10; 1 Peter 1:3, 6, 7.

“The fact that we are called upon to endure trial proves that the Lord Jesus sees in us something very precious, which He desires to develop. If He saw in us nothing whereby He might glorify His name He would not spend time in refining us. We do not take special pains in pruning brambles. Christ does not cast worthless stones into His furnace. It is valuable ore that He tests.”—*Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 214.

- d. Why does God want us to understand the value of trial? 1 Peter 4:12, 13.

“The furnace fires are not to destroy, but to refine, ennoble, sanctify. Without trial we should not feel so much our need of God and His help; and we should become proud and self-sufficient. . . .

“Your heavenly Father loves you, and He will draw you to Himself by the trials that seem to you severe.”—*Ibid.*, vol. 8, pp. 123, 124.

“We should not dishonor God by the mournful relation of trials that appear grievous. All trials that are received as educators will produce joy.”—*Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 365.

5. PREPARING FOR GREATER BLESSINGS

- a. In the midst of unexpected trials that may be keen and cutting, what does the Lord want us to bear in mind? Jeremiah 29:11; John 16:33.
-

“God leads His children by a way that they know not, but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him. He permitted affliction to come upon Job, but He did not forsake him. . . . The very trials that task our faith most severely and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are to lead us closer to Christ, that we may lay all our burdens at His feet and experience the peace which He will give us in exchange.

“God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the dross is separated from the true gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test; He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal, that it may reflect the radiance of His love. It is by close, testing trials that God disciplines His servants. He sees that some have powers which may be used in the advancement of His work, and He puts these persons upon trial; in His providence He brings them into positions that test their character and reveal defects and weaknesses that have been hidden from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him; for He is their only help and safeguard. Thus His object is attained. They are educated, trained, and disciplined, prepared to fulfill the grand purpose for which their powers were given them.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 129, 130.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How is a moment-by-moment sense of the great controversy to affect us?
2. As the great controversy intensifies, what should parents realize?
3. Why was Job able to respond to the attacks against him with relative calm?
4. The next time an unexpected trial comes my way, what should I remember?
5. Why will we grow if we view trials in a more mature way?

The Patience of Job

“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job” (James 5:11, first part).

“[God] permitted trials to come upon you, that, through them, you might experience the peaceable fruits of righteousness.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 416.

Suggested Reading: *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 341–348.

Sunday

January 14

1. HOPE BEHIND THE CLOUD

a. Being human, how did Job feel about his predicament? Job 3:1–3, 9–11, 20–22.

b. What should we all consider in hard times? Job 5:17–19.

“The very time to exercise faith is when we feel destitute of the Spirit. When thick clouds of darkness seem to hover over the mind, then is the time to let living faith pierce the darkness and scatter the clouds.”—*Early Writings*, p. 72.

“To every stricken one, Jesus comes with the ministry of healing. The life of bereavement, pain, and suffering may be brightened by precious revealings of His presence.

“God would not have us remain pressed down by dumb sorrow, with sore and breaking hearts. He would have us look up and behold His dear face of love. The blessed Saviour stands by many whose eyes are so blinded by tears that they do not discern Him. He longs to clasp our hands, to have us look to Him in simple faith, permitting Him to guide us. His heart is open to our griefs, our sorrows, and our trials. He has loved us with an everlasting love and with loving-kindness compassed us about. We may keep the heart stayed upon Him and meditate upon His loving-kindness all the day. He will lift the soul above the daily sorrow and perplexity, into a realm of peace.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 12.

2. WHOSE HEART DO WE TEND TO SEARCH?

- a. **Why did Job seek to search his heart? Proverbs 26:2; Job 9:1–4; 10:1, 2.**
-

“To a great degree the experiences of life are the fruition of our own thoughts and deeds.”—*Education*, p. 146.

- b. **When we fall into unexpected suffering, why is it wise for us to follow Job’s example of self-examination? 2 Corinthians 13:5; Psalm 139:23, 24.**
-

“If each will search and see what sins are lurking in his own heart to shut out Jesus, he will find such a work to do that he will be ready to esteem others better than himself. He will no longer seek to pluck the mote out of his brother’s eye while a beam is in his own eye.”—*Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 213.

- c. **Why does Jesus warn us against being quick to judge the cause of others’ afflictions? Luke 13:1–5.**
-

- d. **Explain Job’s response when friends misjudged his affliction. Job 16:1–3.**
-

“Still another element of bitterness was added to [Job’s] cup. His friends, seeing in adversity but the retribution of sin, pressed on his bruised and burdened spirit their accusations of wrongdoing.”—*Education*, p. 155.

“There is wickedness in our world, but all the suffering is not the result of a perverted course of life. Job is brought distinctly before us as a man whom the Lord allowed Satan to afflict. The enemy stripped him of all he possessed; his family ties were broken; his children were taken from him. For a time his body was covered with loathsome sores, and he suffered greatly. His friends came to comfort him, but they tried to make him see that he was responsible, by his sinful course, for his afflictions. . . . By seeking to make him guilty before God, and deserving of His punishment, they brought a grievous test upon him, and represented God in a false light.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 3, p. 1140.

3. REFLECTING THE DIVINE COMFORTER

- a. **What should we learn from Job's attitude toward his friends? Job 16:4, 5.**
-

“Let no Christian be found an accuser of the brethren. Satan is the one who bears this title; he accuses them before God day and night, he stirs up the enemies of our faith to accuse us, and he prompts those of like precious faith to criticise and condemn one another. We are not to take part in his work. These are days of trial and of great peril, the adversary of souls is upon the track of every one; and while we stand out separate from the world, we should press together in faith and love. United, we are strong; divided, we are weak.

“We are exhorted to love as brethren, to be kind, courteous, forbearing, in honor preferring one another.”—*Historical Sketches*, pp. 213, 214.

- b. **How are we, like the psalmist, to be comforted when no human understands and sympathizes with our pain or sorrow? Psalm 27:10; 73:25, 26.**
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“Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earth-born children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God's providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 162.

“While we review, not the dark chapters in our experience, but the manifestations of God's great mercy and unfailing love, we shall praise far more than complain. We shall talk of the loving faithfulness of God as the true, tender, compassionate shepherd of His flock, which He has declared that none shall pluck out of His hand. The language of the heart will not be selfish murmuring and repining. Praise, like clear-flowing streams, will come from God's truly believing ones.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 367.

4. DEVELOPING PATIENCE

- a. What perspective helps us develop patience in trial? James 5:10; Lamentations 3:31–33.
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“Life is disciplinary. While in the world, the Christian will meet with adverse influences. There will be provocations to test the temper; and it is by meeting these in a right spirit that the Christian graces are developed. If injuries and insults are meekly borne, if insulting words are responded to by gentle answers, and oppressive acts by kindness, this is evidence that the Spirit of Christ dwells in the heart, that sap from the living Vine is flowing to the branches. We are in the school of Christ in this life, where we are to learn to be meek and lowly of heart; and in the day of final accounts we shall see that all the obstacles we meet, all the hardships and annoyances that we are called to bear, are practical lessons in the application of principles of Christian life. If well endured, they develop the Christlike in the character and distinguish the Christian from the worldling.

“There is a high standard to which we are to attain if we would be children of God, noble, pure, holy, and undefiled; and a pruning process is necessary if we would reach this standard. How would this pruning be accomplished if there were no difficulties to meet, no obstacles to surmount, nothing to call out patience and endurance? These trials are not the smallest blessings in our experience. They are designed to nerve us to determination to succeed. We are to use them as God’s means to gain decided victories over self instead of allowing them to hinder, oppress, and destroy us.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 344, 345.

- b. How does Scripture connect trials with patience? Romans 5:3, 4.
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“The Lord frequently places us in difficult positions to stimulate us to greater exertion. In His providence special annoyances sometimes occur to test our patience and faith. God gives us lessons of trust. He would teach us where to look for help and strength in time of need. Thus we obtain practical knowledge of His divine will, which we so much need in our life experience. Faith grows strong in earnest conflict with doubt and fear.”—*Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 116, 117.

5. AGONIZING IN PRAYER

- a. Why are today's trials essential for the conflict ahead? Zechariah 13:9.

“God’s love for His children during the period of their severest trial is as strong and tender as in the days of their sunniest prosperity; but it is needful for them to be placed in the furnace of fire; their earthliness must be consumed, that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected.

“The season of distress and anguish before us will require a faith that can endure weariness, delay, and hunger—a faith that will not faint though severely tried. The period of probation is granted to all to prepare for that time. . . . Those who are unwilling to deny self, to agonize before God, to pray long and earnestly for His blessing, will not obtain it. Wrestling with God—how few know what it is! How few have ever had their souls drawn out after God with intensity of desire until every power is on the stretch. When waves of despair which no language can express sweep over the suppliant, how few cling with unyielding faith to the promises of God. . . .

“We should now acquaint ourselves with God by proving His promises. Angels record every prayer that is earnest and sincere. We should rather dispense with selfish gratifications than neglect communion with God. The deepest poverty, the greatest self-denial, with His approval, is better than riches, honors, ease, and friendship without it. We must take time to pray. If we allow our minds to be absorbed by worldly interests, the Lord may give us time by removing from us our idols of gold, of houses, or of fertile lands.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 621, 622.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where is God when people such as Job are suffering?
2. How might I be guilty of the error of Job's friends?
3. What should we do when there seems to be no answer to our suffering?
4. How do our trials develop patience?
5. Describe the type of experience we need in preparation for the final events.

Glory Only to God

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5, first part).

“We have nothing to recommend us to God; but the plea that we may urge now and ever is our utterly helpless condition that makes His redeeming power a necessity.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 317.

Suggested Reading: *Education*, pp. 253–261.

Sunday

January 21

1. THE SUFFERING OF A VIRTUOUS MAN

- a. Describe the virtues that characterized Job’s daily life. Job 29:5, 8–16.

“God has given in His word a picture of a prosperous man—one whose life was in the truest sense a success, a man whom both heaven and earth delighted to honor. [Job 29:4–16 quoted.]”—*Education*, p. 142.

- b. What timeless lesson are we to learn from Job’s trials? Psalm 34:18, 19.

“It is very natural for human beings to think that great calamities are a sure index of great crimes and enormous sins; but men often make a mistake in thus measuring character. We are not living in the time of retributive judgment. Good and evil are mingled, and calamities come upon all. Sometimes men do pass the boundary line beyond God’s protecting care, and then Satan exercises his power upon them, and God does not interpose. Job was sorely afflicted, and his friends sought to make him acknowledge that his suffering was the result of sin, and cause him to feel under condemnation. They represented his case as that of a great sinner.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 3, p. 1140.

2. THE WAKE-UP CALL

- a. **Although Job's conscience was clean and his life virtuous, what did God want His faithful servant to pause to consider? Job 38:1–7; 40:1, 2.**
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“Every opening flower, every leaf with its delicate veins, will testify of the infinite skill of the great Master Artist. The massive rocks and towering mountains that rise in the distance are not the result of chance. They speak in silent eloquence of One who sits upon the throne of the universe, high and lifted up. . . . All His plans are perfect. What awe and reverence should His name inspire!”—*Our High Calling*, p. 251.

- b. **How did Job respond to God's wake-up call? How should all respond who, like Job, may have been cruelly misunderstood and unjustly maligned by others? Job 40:3–5; 42:6.**
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“Some shortsighted, short-experienced friends cannot, with their narrow vision, appreciate the feelings of one who has been in close harmony with the soul of Christ in connection with the salvation of others. His motives are misunderstood and his actions misconstrued by those who would be his friends, until, like Job, he sends forth the earnest prayer: Save me from my friends. God takes the case of Job in hand Himself. His patience has been severely taxed; but when God speaks, all his pettish feelings are changed. The self-justification which he felt was necessary to withstand the condemnation of his friends is not necessary toward God. He never misjudges; He never errs. Says the Lord to Job, ‘Gird up now thy loins like a man;’ and Job no sooner hears the divine voice than his soul is bowed down with a sense of his sinfulness, and he says before God, ‘I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes’ (Job 38:3; 42:6).”—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 509.

“We are living in perilous times. Seventh-day Adventists are professedly the commandment-keeping people of God; but they are losing their devotional spirit. This spirit of reverence for God teaches men how to approach their Maker—with sacredness and awe through faith, not in themselves, but in a Mediator. Thus man is kept fast, under whatever circumstances he is placed.”—*Notebook Leaflets*, vol. 1, p. 121.

3. GOD'S ABUNDANT GRACE

- a. What should we learn from the Lord's final verdict concerning Job and his friends? Job 42:7-9.
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- b. What did God then do for Job? Why? Job 42:10-17; Psalm 66:10-12.
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"From the depths of discouragement and despondency Job rose to the heights of implicit trust in the mercy and the saving power of God."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 163.

"When Job caught a glimpse of his Creator, he abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes. Then the Lord was able to bless him abundantly and to make his last years the best of his life."—*Ibid.*, p. 164.

- c. Why should the attitude of faithful Job be an inspiration to every Christian? James 5:11; Ephesians 2:8-10.
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"Those who live nearest to Jesus discern most clearly the frailty and sinfulness of humanity, and their only hope is in the merit of a crucified and risen Saviour."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 471.

"In His divine arrangement, through His unmerited favor, the Lord has ordained that good works shall be rewarded. We are accepted through Christ's merit alone; and the acts of mercy, the deeds of charity, which we perform, are the fruits of faith; and they become a blessing to us; for men are to be rewarded according to their works. It is the fragrance of the merit of Christ that makes our good works acceptable to God, and it is grace that enables us to do the works for which He rewards us. Our works in and of themselves have no merit. When we have done all that it is possible for us to do, we are to count ourselves as unprofitable servants. We deserve no thanks from God. We have only done what it was our duty to do, and our works could not have been performed in the strength of our own sinful natures."—*The Review and Herald*, January 29, 1895.

4. CHRIST UPLIFTED

- a. As virtuous a man as Job was, what should we realize about the spiritual needs of this man (or those of any other person)? 1 Peter 1:18, 19.
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“The prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor, who is at God’s right hand, presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 344.

“The more of the Spirit of Christ we have, the more humble we shall become. When we obtain clear views of Christ, no words of self-exaltation will escape our lips. When the Lord gave to Job a view of His majesty, Job ceased to vindicate his own righteousness. He felt his sinfulness, and humbled himself before the purity and holiness of God. ‘I abhor myself,’ he said, ‘and repent in dust and ashes’ (Job 42:6). Yet by the pen of inspiration, God presents Job as perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil. ‘There is none like him in the earth’ (Job 1:8).”—*The Signs of the Times*, August 11, 1898.

- b. How do we know that Job trusted in Christ as his Saviour? Job 19:25–27. To what inspiring determination should this lead each of us?
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“You now have precious hours of probation granted you to form a right character. . . . You now have a period allotted you in which to redeem the time. You cannot in your own strength put away your errors and wrongs; they have been increasing upon you for years, because you have not seen them in their hideousness and in the strength of God resolutely put them away. By living faith you must lay hold on an arm that is mighty to save. Humble your poor, proud, self-righteous heart before God; get low, very low, all broken in your sinfulness at His feet. Devote yourself to the work of preparation. Rest not until you can truly say: My Redeemer liveth, and, because He lives, I shall live also.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 88.

5. TRUSTING IN GOD'S GOODNESS

- a. **When the outlook is bleak, what attitude strengthens us to follow the faith of Job? Job 13:15, 16.**
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“We are justified to walk by sight as long as we can, but when we can no longer see the way clearly, then we need to put our hand in our heavenly Father’s and let Him lead. There are emergencies in the life of all in which we can neither follow sight nor trust to memory or experience. All we can do is simply to trust and wait. We shall honor God to trust Him because He is our heavenly Father.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, p. 186.

“Are you tempted to give way to feelings of anxious foreboding or utter despondency? In the darkest days, when appearances seem most forbidding, fear not. Have faith in God.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 164.

- b. **How does the history of Job illustrate righteousness by faith, and how is this theme to be reflected in our lives? Romans 5:1–5; Titus 3:3–7.**
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“It is only as we depend upon the strength and righteousness of Christ that we can stand the testing of God. We shall have to educate the mind, and again and again bring to our remembrance the fact that Christ has his hand upon us. With his own divine lips he has said, ‘Without me ye can do nothing,’ but through Christ we can do all things. It is not for us to mark out the way in which we shall walk; but if we take everything that comes to us as in the providence of God, even our tribulation will work patience, and we need not sink in discouragement while we look by faith to Jesus.”—*The Signs of the Times*, March 28, 1892.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why may I be in danger of misjudging the case of a suffering person?
2. What is nearly extinct in the worship of God, yet is nonetheless essential?
3. What startled Job out of his misery?
4. Why is it so important to depend on the divine Redeemer?
5. No matter how bad things get, what should we always keep in mind?

First Sabbath Offering for World Disasters and Welfare

“Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry”(Psalm 146:7).

The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” The poor are all around us, the distressed, the afflicted, the sorrowing, and those who are ready to perish. There is a great need for the exercise of mercy today as ever was.

God has made us His stewards, and He is not to be charged with the sufferings, the misery, the nakedness, and the want of humanity. The Lord has made ample provision for all of us. He has given us large supplies with which to alleviate the want of these sufferers and underprivileged ones.

Every day we hear of earthquakes, wars, floods, volcanoes and other disasters and troubles all over the world resulting in destruction, and great damage to property and life. As soon as we here about a calamity, we immediately swing into action to respond to their needs. The way we respond depends deeply on the nature of the disaster, the country, the economic and geo-political situation at hand. We immediately begin to assess the situation to determine the most appropriate actions.

In addition to this, in time of peace the Welfare Department provides assistance such as funding through proposals, technical assistance, training, mentorship, and project identification and implementation. Where we have expertise, we want to assist by providing oversight and guidance as needed. Our goal is to empower the local church to meet the needs of their community; whether in the form of food, clothing, blankets, shelter, or emotional support and counseling.

Sharing God’s love around the world is like an airplane which needs fuel to propel it. Your liberal offerings are the fuel that propels almost every aspect of helping these destitutes. Without your involvement and this fuel, our best efforts are sure to be a disaster as well. It is hard for everyone to go to the site of calamities, but your means can go far. We appeal to you that your heart may be moved to partake in this noble task. Please, give liberally for this cause.



Your brethren from the Welfare Department

A Time of Spiritual Crisis

“Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14).

“There was ever a remnant who were true to Jehovah; and from time to time the Lord raised up faithful and valiant men to put down idolatry and to deliver the Israelites from their enemies.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 545.

Suggested Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 543–547.

Sunday

January 28

1. GUILTY BEFORE GOD

- a. In the settlement of Canaan, what did Israel neglect to do? Judges 1:28–33.

“The Lord had faithfully fulfilled, on His part, the promises made to Israel; Joshua had broken the power of the Canaanites, and had distributed the land to the tribes. It only remained for them, trusting in the assurance of divine aid, to complete the work of dispossessing the inhabitants of the land. But this they failed to do. By entering into league with the Canaanites they directly transgressed the command of God, and thus failed to fulfill the condition on which He had promised to place them in possession of Canaan.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 543.

- b. What shows that this was a very serious matter? Exodus 23:24, 25.

“From the very first communication of God with them at Sinai, [Israel] had been warned against idolatry. . . .

“But regardless of their high destiny, they chose the course of ease and self-indulgence; they let slip their opportunities for completing the conquest of the land.”—*Ibid.*, pp. 543, 544.

2. THE HIGH COST OF NEGLIGENCE

- a. **By failing to do their duty before God, what happened to Israel, and how was this a fulfilment of prophecy? Psalm 106:35–40; Numbers 33:55.**
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“Until the generation that had received instruction from Joshua became extinct, idolatry made little headway; but the parents had prepared the way for the apostasy of their children. The disregard of the Lord’s restrictions on the part of those who came in possession of Canaan sowed seed of evil that continued to bring forth bitter fruit for many generations. The simple habits of the Hebrews had secured them physical health; but association with the heathen led to the indulgence of appetite and passion, which gradually lessened physical strength and enfeebled the mental and moral powers. By their sins the Israelites were separated from God; His strength was removed from them, and they could no longer prevail against their enemies. Thus they were brought into subjection to the very nations that through God they might have subdued.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 544, 545.

- b. **What step was the Lord finally compelled to take, and why should we take this matter seriously in our day? Judges 2:12; Psalm 78:58, 60, 61.**
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“The most grievous sin of idolatry exists in the church. Anything that interposes between the Christian and the wholehearted service to God, takes the form of an idol, and the most grievous sin of idolatry is idolatry itself.”—*The Paulson Collection*, p. 343.

“Like ancient Israel the church has dishonored her God by departing from the light, neglecting her duties, and abusing her high and exalted privilege of being peculiar and holy in character. Her members have violated their covenant to live for God and Him only. They have joined with the selfish and world-loving.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 441, 442.

“God classes as idolaters those who trust in their own wisdom, their own devising, depending for success on their riches and power, striving to strengthen themselves by alliance with men whom the world calls great, but who fail to discern the binding claims of His law.”—*The Review and Herald*, March 15, 1906.

3. FLEEING IDOLATRY

- a. What appeals are made in the Christian era regarding idolatry? 1 Corinthians 10:14; Galatians 5:19–21. Describe the startling vision shown to Lord’s messenger about the perils of this evil.
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“A large company of heathen idolaters bore a black banner, upon which were figures of the sun, moon, and stars. This company seemed to be very fierce and angry. I was then shown another company bearing a pure white banner, upon which was written, ‘Purity and holiness unto the Lord.’ Their countenances were marked with firmness and heavenly resignation. I saw the heathen idolaters approach them, and there was a great slaughter. The Christians melted away before them; and yet the Christian company pressed the more closely together, and held the banner more firmly. As many fell, others rallied around the banner and filled their places.

“I saw the company of idolaters consulting together. Failing to make the Christians yield, they agreed to another plan. I saw them lower their banner and then approach that firm Christian company and make propositions to them. At first their propositions were utterly refused. Then I saw the Christian company consulting together. Some said that they would lower the banner, accept the propositions, and save their lives, and at last they could gain strength to raise their banner among the heathen. A few, however, would not yield to this plan, but firmly chose to die holding their banner rather than to lower it. Then I saw many lower the banner and unite with the heathen; but the firm and steadfast would again seize it and bear it on high. I saw that persons were continually leaving the company of those who bore the pure banner, and were uniting with the idolaters under the black banner, to persecute those bearing the white banner. Many were slain, yet the white banner was held high, and believers were raised up to rally around it.”—*Early Writings*, pp. 211, 212.

- b. Name another common form of idolatry to be shunned. Colossians 3:5, 6.
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“All covetousness is condemned as idolatry. All selfish indulgence is an offense in God’s sight.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 261.

4. A DELIVERER NEEDED

- a. **What bitter consequences followed Israel’s idolatry during the time of the judges? Judges 6:1–5.**

“The wild, fierce inhabitants of the desert, ‘as locusts for multitude’ (Judges 6:5, R.V.), came swarming into the land, with their flocks and herds. Like a devouring plague they spread over the country, from the river Jordan to the Philistine plain. They came as soon as the harvests began to ripen, and remained until the last fruits of the earth had been gathered. They stripped the fields of their increase and robbed and maltreated the inhabitants and then returned to the deserts. Thus the Israelites dwelling in the open country were forced to abandon their homes, and to congregate in walled towns, to seek refuge in fortresses, or even to find shelter in caves and rocky fastnesses among the mountains.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 546.

- b. **What did the Israelites finally do, and what merciful response did they receive? Judges 6:6–10.**

“As the people in their distress gave heed to the Lord’s reproof, and confessed their sins, God again raised up a helper for them.”—*Ibid.*

- c. **Whom did God raise up as the man of the hour? Why? Judges 6:11–14; Proverbs 4:26; Haggai 1:7.**

“As Gideon labored in secrecy and silence, he sadly pondered upon the condition of Israel and considered how the oppressor’s yoke might be broken from off his people.”—*Ibid.*

“He whose mind is opened to the Word of God will prayerfully consider every way of his feet, so that he may honor God and keep the way of the Lord.”—*That I May Know Him*, p. 251.

5. A HUMBLE MAN OF ACTION

- a. What attitude should we learn from the spirit of Gideon when addressed by the Messenger of heaven? Judges 6:15, 22, 23.
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“When God sent His angels anciently to minister or communicate to individuals, and these persons learned that they had seen and talked with an angel, they were struck with awe and were afraid that they should die. They had so exalted views of the terrible majesty and power of God that they thought it would destroy them to be brought into close connection with one direct from His holy presence.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 410.

- b. What important requirement did Gideon perform that was highly essential in order to begin the work of reformation among his people? Judges 6:24–27.
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“The deliverance of Israel was to be preceded by a solemn protest against the worship of Baal. Gideon must declare war upon idolatry before going out to battle with the enemies of his people.

“The divine direction was faithfully carried out. Knowing that he would be opposed if it were attempted openly, Gideon performed the work in secret; with the aid of his servants, accomplishing the whole in one night.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 547.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to separate from known sources of temptation?
2. What specific sins caused the oppression from the Midianites?
3. Which is more dangerous—persecution from evil or compromise with evil?
4. At the crisis hour, what reveals the amazing mercy of our God?
5. What steps do I need to take in order to make a real reformation in my life?

Reviving a Remnant

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life: that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:3, 4).

“Follow step after step in the path of duty. Steep places may have to be climbed, but go forward in the path of humility, of faith and self-denial, leaving the clouds of doubt behind you.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 272.

Suggested Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 547–549.

Sunday

February 4

1. THE SPIRIT OF GOD AT WORK

a. After Gideon had disposed of his father’s altar to Baal by night, how did the men of the city react the next morning? Judges 6:28–30.

b. How did Gideon’s father respond? Why? Judges 6:31, 32.

“Gideon had told his father, Joash, of the Angel’s visit, and the promise that Israel should be delivered. He also related to him the divine command to destroy the altar of Baal. The Spirit of God moved upon the heart of Joash. He saw that the gods whom he had worshiped had no power even to save themselves from utter destruction and hence they could not protect their worshipers. When the idolatrous multitude clamored for the death of Gideon, Joash fearlessly stood in his defense, and endeavored to show the people how powerless and unworthy of trust or adoration were their gods. [Judges 6:31 quoted.]

“He reminded them that the penalty of death would justly rest upon themselves instead of Gideon, for they had broken the law of God against idolatry.”—*The Signs of the Times*, June 23, 1881.

2. GOD'S AMAZING PROVIDENCE

a. How did the putting away of idols motivate progress? Judges 6:33–35.

“The whole transaction [of destroying the idols], with the stirring appeals of Gideon, produced a powerful effect upon the people of Ophrah. All thoughts of violence were dismissed; and when, moved by the Spirit of the Lord, Gideon sounded the trumpet of war, they were among the first to gather to him. He then sent messengers throughout his own tribe of Manasseh, and also to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and all cheerfully obeyed the call.”—*The Signs of the Times*, June 23, 1881.

b. What can we learn from Gideon's prayers requesting confirmation from the Lord? What spirit prompted his petitions? Judges 6:36–40.

“Gideon deeply felt his own insufficiency for the great work before him. He dared not place himself at the head of the army without positive evidence that God had called him to this work, and that he would be with him. . . .

“Unbelief suggested that wool naturally absorbs moisture when there is any in the air, and that the test was not decisive. Hence, [Gideon] asked a renewal of the sign, humbly pleading that unbelief might not move the Lord to anger. His request was granted. . . .

“Before honor is humility. The Lord can use most effectually those who are most sensible of their own unworthiness and inefficiency. He will teach them to exercise the courage of faith. He will make them strong by uniting their weakness to His might, wise by connecting their ignorance with His wisdom.

“God will accept the services of all who will work in obedience to His will, who will not for any consideration bring a stain upon the conscience, who will not permit any influence to lead them from the path of duty. . . .

“The teachable and trusting ones, having a right purpose and a pure heart, need not wait for great occasions or for extraordinary abilities before they employ their powers. They should not stand irresolute, questioning, and fearing what the world will say or think of them. We are not to weary ourselves with anxious care, but to go on, quietly performing with faithfulness the work which God assigns us, and leaving the result wholly with Him.”—*Ibid.*

3. GOD KNOWS THE HEART

- a. **What law had been established in ancient Israel, revealing God's compassion for families during times of war? Deuteronomy 20:5-8.**
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"It had been made a law in Israel that before they went to battle, the following proclamation should be sounded throughout the army: [Deuteronomy 20:5-8 quoted]. What a striking illustration is this of the tender, pitying love of Christ! He who instituted the relations of life and the ties of kindred, made special provision that these be not too widely broken. He would have none go forth to battle unwillingly. This proclamation also sets forth in a forcible manner the influence which may be exerted by one man who is deficient in faith and courage, and further shows the effect of our thoughts and feelings upon our own course of action."—*The Signs of the Times*, June 30, 1881.

- b. **Now that Gideon had been assured of God's direction in his venture, how did the Lord again amaze him? Why? Judges 7:1, 2. What effect does pride have upon us today?**
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"Because his numbers were so few compared with those of the enemy, Gideon had refrained from making the usual proclamation [of Deuteronomy 20:5-8]. He was filled with astonishment at the declaration that his army was too large. But the Lord saw the pride and unbelief existing in the hearts of His people. Aroused by the stirring appeals of Gideon, they had readily enlisted; but many were filled with fear when they saw the multitudes of the Midianites. Yet, had Israel triumphed, those very ones would have taken the glory to themselves instead of ascribing the victory to God.

"Gideon obeyed the Lord's direction, and with a heavy heart he saw twenty-two thousand, or more than two thirds of his entire force, depart for their homes."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 549.

"Pride of heart is a fearful trait of character. 'Pride goeth before destruction' (Proverbs 16:18, first part). This is true in the family, the church, and the nation."—*The Faith I Live By*, p. 68.

4. A TEST OF CHARACTER

- a. After Gideon's army was reduced to a mere 10,000, what did God tell him to do before going to battle? Why? Judges 7:4, 5.
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"The people were led down to the waterside, expecting to make an immediate advance upon the enemy. A few hastily took a little water in the hand and sucked it up as they went on; but nearly all bowed upon their knees, and leisurely drank from the surface of the stream. Those who took of the water in their hands were but three hundred out of ten thousand; yet these were selected; all the rest were permitted to return to their homes.

"By the simplest means character is often tested. Those who in time of peril were intent upon supplying their own wants were not the men to be trusted in an emergency. The Lord has no place in His work for the indolent and self-indulgent. The men of His choice were the few who would not permit their own wants to delay them in the discharge of duty."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 549.

- b. How does the actual principle God was teaching likewise apply to us in His church today? Philippians 2:4; 3:13, 14.
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"Success does not depend upon strength or numbers. God can deliver by few as well as by many. A large church is not necessarily a strong church. Some of its members may be cherishing selfishness, pride, or unbelief; some may be dishonest, others corrupt in heart and life. All these are a source of weakness to the church. They bring the frown of God upon His people, and the great adversary will work through them to advance his own cause.

"Anciently, those whose worldly interests would draw their hearts from the work of God, were bidden to return to their homes. It were better for the cause of truth today, if those whose attention is absorbed with their own private interests, would separate from the work of God, and give themselves to the things in which their hearts delight. Then they would not, by their wrong example, exert so dangerous an influence upon others.

"God is honored, not so much by the great number, as by the character of those who serve Him."—*The Signs of the Times*, June 30, 1881.

5. SOLDIERS OF THE PRINCE OF PEACE

- a. What is God's plan for all enlisted in His spiritual army? 2 Timothy 2:3–5.

“We are not placed in this world merely to care for ourselves, but we are required to aid in the great work of salvation, thus imitating the self-denying, self-sacrificing, useful life of Christ.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 325.

“True Christian character is marked by a singleness of purpose, an indomitable determination, which refuses to yield to worldly influences, which will aim at nothing short of the Bible standard. If men will permit themselves to become discouraged in the service of God, the great adversary will present abundant reasons to turn them from the plain path of duty to one of ease and irresponsibility. Those who can be bribed or seduced, discouraged or terrified, will be of no service in the Christian warfare. Those who set their affections on worldly treasures or worldly honors, will not push the battle against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places.

“All who would be soldiers of the cross of Christ, must gird on the armor and prepare for conflict. They should not be intimidated by threats; or terrified by dangers. They must be cautious in peril, yet firm and brave in facing the foe and doing battle for God. The consecration of Christ's follower must be complete. Father, mother, wife, children, houses, lands, everything, must be held secondary to the work and cause of God. He must be willing to bear patiently, cheerfully, joyfully, whatever in God's providence he may be called to suffer. His final reward will be to share with Christ the throne of immortal glory.”—*The Signs of the Times*, June 30, 1881.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How can I appeal to someone in apostasy as Gideon did to Joash?
2. Why was Gideon the one assigned to the task of delivering God's people?
3. Why did God want the 32,000 to be reduced to 10,000?
4. Explain how the test about how the men drank water can be applied today.
5. What does it mean to be a spiritual soldier for a kingdom not of this world?

Active Trust

“And Gideon said unto [the men of Israel], I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you” (Judges 8:23).

“When sorely tried, do not place your trust in the arm of flesh, but in the living God. Have faith in the One who is by your side ready to tell you what steps to take in times of perplexity and trial. He has everything marked out.”—*Sermons and Talks*, vol. 2, p. 178.

Suggested Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 550–559.

Sunday

February 11

1. SERIOUS MINUTEMEN

- a. Out of 10,000 who drank water before battle, how many took their mission seriously, and what result did God promise them? Judges 7:6–9.

“Not only did [the small remnant] possess courage and self-control, but they were men of faith. They had not defiled themselves by idolatry.”—*The Signs of the Times*, June 30, 1881.

“The Lord is just as willing to work through human efforts now, and to accomplish great things through weak instrumentalities. It is essential to have an intelligent knowledge of the truth; for how else could we meet its wily opponents? The Bible must be studied, not alone for the doctrines it teaches, but for its practical lessons. You should never be surprised, you should never be without your armor on. Be prepared for any emergency, for any call of duty. Be waiting, watching for every opportunity to present the truth familiar with the prophecies, familiar with the lessons of Christ. But do not trust in well prepared arguments. Argument alone is not enough. God must be sought on your knees; you must go forth to meet the people through the power and influence of His Spirit.

“Act promptly. God would have you minute men, as were the men who composed Gideon’s army.”—*The Review and Herald*, July 1, 1884.

2. CHOOSING THE NARROW PATH

- a. What reveals God's use of small numbers in His work? How does He bid us operate even in our schools? Romans 9:27; 12:1, 2; James 4:4.
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"Some will urge that if religious teaching is to be made prominent our schools will become unpopular; that those who are not of our faith will not patronize them. Very well; then let them go to other schools, where they will find a system of education that suits their taste. It is Satan's purpose by these considerations to prevent the attainment of the object for which our schools were established. Hindered by his devices, the managers reason after the manner of the world and copy its plans and imitate its customs. Many have so far shown their lack of wisdom from above as to join with the enemies of God and the truth in providing worldly entertainments for the students. In doing this they bring upon themselves the frown of God, for they mislead the youth and do a work for Satan. This work, with all its results, they must meet at the bar of God.

"Those who pursue such a course show that they cannot be trusted. . . . When the Lord requires us to be distinct and peculiar, how can we crave popularity or seek to imitate the customs and practices of the world? . . .

"To lower the standard in order to secure popularity and an increase of numbers, and then to make this increase a cause of rejoicing, shows great blindness. If numbers were an evidence of success, Satan might claim the preeminence; for in this world his followers are largely in the majority. It is the degree of moral power pervading a school that is a test of its prosperity. It is the virtue, intelligence, and piety of the people composing our schools, not their numbers, that should be a source of joy and thankfulness."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 142, 143.

"Many who occupy responsible positions in the church of God, are sacrificing their integrity to secure the favor of the ungodly. A strong current is sweeping downward, and they decide that it is easier to float with the tide than to row against it. Like the children of Israel, they sacrifice the blessings of God by their indolence and spiritual sloth. Many set up idols in their hearts—idols of selfishness, idols of pride, and love of display. Eternal things lose their value. Withdraw the influences which God has provided to preserve and strengthen our spirituality, and it decays and dies. We must be continually seeking to draw near to God, and to learn His will."—*The Signs of the Times*, June 30, 1881.

3. VICTORY AND TACT

- a. In God's work today, what should we learn from the unusual strategy given to Gideon's army? Judges 7:12–22.
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“It is a dangerous thing for men to resist the Spirit of truth and grace and righteousness, because its manifestations are not according to their ideas, and have not come in the line of their methodical plans. The Lord works in His own way, and according to His own devising. Let men pray that they may be divested of self, and may be in harmony with heaven. . . . In the instruction that the Lord gave Gideon when he was about to fight with the Midianites—that he should go out against his foes with an army of three hundred blowing trumpets, and carrying empty pitchers in their hands, and shouting, ‘The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon’—these precise, methodical, formal men would see nothing but inconsistency and confusion. They would start back with determined protest and resistance. They would have held long controversies to show the inconsistency and the dangers that would accompany the carrying on of the warfare in such an extreme way, and in their finite judgment they would pronounce all such movements as utterly ridiculous and unreasonable.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 2, p. 1004.

- b. Explain the benefit of Gideon's tactfulness toward his brethren. Judges 7:23–25; 8:1–3.
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“[The men of Ephraim] were jealous and angry, as though Gideon had been led by his own will and judgment. They did not discern God's hand in the triumph of Israel, they did not appreciate His power and mercy in their deliverance; and this very fact showed them unworthy to be chosen as His special instruments. . . .

“The spirit of jealousy might easily have been fanned into a quarrel that would have caused strife and bloodshed; but Gideon's modest answer soothed the anger of the men of Ephraim, and they returned in peace to their homes. Firm and uncompromising where principle was concerned, and in war a ‘mighty man of valor,’ Gideon displayed also a spirit of courtesy that is rarely witnessed.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 554, 555.

4. STANDING, THEN FALLING

- a. How was Gideon's attitude exemplary in refusing to violate the principles of God's theocracy? Judges 8:22, 23.
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- b. Despite his unassuming modesty, what mistake did Gideon then make, and what warning should we heed from this? Judges 8:24–27.
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"The season of inactivity that succeeds a great struggle is often fraught with greater danger than is the period of conflict. To this danger Gideon was now exposed. A spirit of unrest was upon him. Hitherto he had been content to fulfill the directions given him from God; but now, instead of waiting for divine guidance, he began to plan for himself. When the armies of the Lord have gained a signal victory, Satan will redouble his efforts to overthrow the work of God. Thus thoughts and plans were suggested to the mind of Gideon, by which the people of Israel were led astray.

"Because he had been commanded to offer sacrifice upon the rock where the Angel appeared to him, Gideon concluded that he had been appointed to officiate as a priest. Without waiting for the divine sanction, he determined to provide a suitable place, and to institute a system of worship similar to that carried on at the tabernacle. With the strong popular feeling in his favor he found no difficulty in carrying out his plan. At his request all the earrings of gold taken from the Midianites were given him as his share of the spoil. The people also collected many other costly materials, together with the richly adorned garments of the princes of Midian. From the material thus furnished, Gideon constructed an ephod and a breastplate, in imitation of those worn by the high priest. His course proved a snare to himself and his family, as well as to Israel. The unauthorized worship led many of the people finally to forsake the Lord altogether, to serve idols. After Gideon's death great numbers, among whom were his own family, joined in this apostasy. The people were led away from God by the very man who had once overthrown their idolatry.

"There are few who realize how far-reaching is the influence of their words and acts. How often the errors of parents produce the most disastrous effects upon their children and children's children, long after the actors themselves have been laid in the grave."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 555, 556.

5. TRUST NOT IN THE ARM OF FLESH

- a. How did Gideon's later mistake affect the people after his death? Judges 8:28, 33–35. Where does our safety lie today?
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"[Gideon] thought himself the least in his father's house. Human wisdom would not have selected him; but God saw in Gideon a man of integrity and moral courage. He was distrustful of self, and willing to listen to the teachings of God, and carry out His purposes. The Lord is not dependent upon men of high position, of great intellect, or extensive knowledge. Such men are frequently proud and self-sufficient. They feel themselves competent to devise and execute plans without counsel from God. They separate themselves from the true Vine, and hence become dry and fruitless, as withered branches.

"The Lord would put to shame the vaunting of men. He will give success to the feeblest efforts, the most unpromising methods, when divinely appointed, and entered upon with humility and trust. God will not test our faith beyond endurance. He will give us sufficient evidence, that we may, in our weakness, lean upon the arm of His strength, and trust wholly in His power. Talents, education, and influence, may, under the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, be employed in the service of God; but Satan is more often served by them, than is Jesus Christ."—*The Signs of the Times*, June 30, 1881.

"Those who stand in the highest positions may lead astray. The wisest err; the strongest may falter and stumble. There is need that light from above should be constantly shed upon our pathway. Our only safety lies in trusting our way implicitly to Him who has said, 'Follow Me.' "—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 556.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe our duties as "minutemen" for God today.
2. What mistake is often made in denominational institutions for the public?
3. Why did God choose such a simple strategy to defeat the Midianites?
4. Even for those who seem humble, what mistake of Gideon can be a snare?
5. Why are we warned against trusting in the arm of flesh?

Planning Victorious Families

“How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?”
(Judges 13:12).

“In cultivating that which is best in themselves, parents are exerting an influence to mold society and to uplift future generations. . . . Even before the birth of the child, the preparation should begin that will enable it to fight successfully the battle against evil.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 371.

Suggested Reading: *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 371–378.
Selected Messages, bk. 2, pp. 420–433.

Sunday

February 18

1. GUIDANCE FOR BOTH PARENTS

- a. What was the instruction given by the angel of the Lord to Manoh's wife, and how did she and her husband both reveal their zeal to honor the Lord? Judges 13:2–12; James 1:5.

“Let every mother go often to her Saviour with the prayer, ‘Teach us, how shall we order the child, and what shall we do unto him?’ Let her heed the instruction which God has given in His word, and wisdom will be given her as she shall have need.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 573.

“Upon fathers as well as mothers rests a responsibility for the child's earlier as well as its later training, and for both parents the demand for careful and thorough preparation is most urgent. Before taking upon themselves the possibilities of fatherhood and motherhood, men and women should become acquainted with the laws of physical development—with physiology and hygiene, with the bearing of prenatal influences, with the laws of heredity, sanitation, dress, exercise, and the treatment of disease; they should also understand the laws of mental development and moral training.”—*Education*, p. 276.

2. A SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY

- a. What counsel was repeated to both parents? Why? Judges 13:13, 14, 24.
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“The well-being of the child will be affected by the habits of the mother. Her appetites and passions are to be controlled by principle. There is something for her to shun, something for her to work against, if she fulfills God’s purpose for her in giving her a child. If before the birth of her child she is self-indulgent, if she is selfish, impatient, and exacting, these traits will be reflected in the disposition of the child. Thus many children have received as a birthright almost unconquerable tendencies to evil.

“But if the mother unswervingly adheres to right principles, if she is temperate and self-denying, if she is kind, gentle, and unselfish, she may give her child these same precious traits of character.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 372, 373.

“It was not enough that Samson, the child who was to deliver Israel, should have a good legacy at his birth. This was to be followed by careful training. From infancy he was to be trained to habits of strict temperance.”—*Ibid.*, p. 379.

- b. Why is the privilege of parenthood a very solemn matter? Psalm 127:3.
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“The father should bear in mind that the treatment of his wife before the birth of his offspring will materially affect the disposition of the mother during that period, and will have very much to do with the character developed by the child after its birth. Many fathers have been so anxious to obtain property fast that higher considerations have been sacrificed, and some men have been criminally neglectful of the mother and her offspring, and too frequently the lives of both have been sacrificed to the strong desire to accumulate wealth. Many do not immediately suffer this heavy penalty for their wrongdoing, and are asleep as to the result of their course. The condition of the wife is sometimes no better than that of a slave, and sometimes she is equally guilty with the husband, of squandering physical strength, to obtain means to live fashionably. It is a crime for such to have children, for their offspring will often be deficient in physical, mental, and moral worth, and will bear the miserable, close, selfish impress of their parents, and the world will be cursed with their meanness.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, pp. 428, 429.

3. LABORING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

- a. Name some keys to enjoying greater peace in family life. **Philippians 4:5–8.**
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“The mother, before the birth of her children, is often permitted to labor beyond her strength. Her burdens and cares are seldom lessened, and that period, which should be to her of all others, a time of rest, is one of fatigue, sadness, and gloom. By too great exertion on her part, she deprives her offspring of that nutrition which nature has provided for it, and by heating her blood, she imparts to it, a bad quality of blood. The offspring is robbed of its vitality, robbed of physical and mental strength. The father should study how to make the mother happy. He should not allow himself to come to his home with a clouded brow.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, pp. 427, 428.

“It is the duty of men and women to act with reason in regard to their labor. They should not exhaust their energies unnecessarily, for by doing this, they not only bring suffering upon themselves but, by their errors, bring anxiety, weariness, and suffering upon those they love. What calls for such an amount of labor? Intemperance in eating, and in drinking, and the desire for wealth have led to this intemperance in labor.”—*Ibid.*, p. 429.

“Mothers, let your countenance be full of sunshine. Smile if you can, and the infant’s mind and heart will reflect the light of your countenance.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 436.

- b. **Why did Israel urgently need to produce valiant men, and how does a similar need exist today? Judges 13:1; Jeremiah 2:12–14; 1 Corinthians 3:3.**
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“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.

“But such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.”—*Education*, p. 57.

4. THE INFLUENCE OF ASSOCIATION

- a. **What request did Samson make of his parents? Judges 14:1–3. Despite their good intentions, what perils might Samson’s parents have overlooked? 1 Corinthians 15:33.**

“The town of Zorah being near the country of the Philistines, Samson came to mingle with them on friendly terms. Thus in his youth intimacies sprang up, the influence of which darkened his whole life.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 562.

“Great care should be taken by Christian youth in the formation of friendships and in the choice of companions. Take heed, lest what you now think to be pure gold turns out to be base metal. Worldly associations tend to place obstructions in the way of your service to God, and many souls are ruined by unhappy unions . . . with those who can never elevate or ennoble.”—*Messages to Young People*, p. 436.

“Fathers and mothers should feel that a duty devolves upon them to guide the affections of the youth, that they may be placed upon those who will be suitable companions. They should feel it a duty, by their own teaching and example, with the assisting grace of God, to so mold the character of the children from their earliest years that they will be pure and noble, and will be attracted to the good and true. Like attracts like; like appreciates like. Let the love for truth and purity and goodness be early implanted in the soul, and the youth will seek the society of those who possess these characteristics.”—*Ibid.*, p. 466.

“While we shall not cease to warn and entreat and try to present the truth to the parents who are unbelievers, to mix and mingle with them in association will be to the ruin of your children.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9, p. 74.

“Fathers and mothers, do you realize the importance of the responsibility resting on you? Do you allow your children to associate with other children without being present to know what kind of education they are receiving? Do not allow them to be alone with other children.”—*Child Guidance*, p. 114.

- b. **Who was responsible for the unhappiness in Samson’s life? Galatians 6:5, 7.**

“Had Samson as faithfully obeyed the divine commands as faithfully as his parents had done, his would have been a nobler and happier destiny. But association with idolaters corrupted him.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 562.

5. GUIDANCE AVAILABLE

- a. Why does God forbid marriage of believers to unbelievers? What have been the results of such alliances? Judges 3:5–8; Deuteronomy 7:3; Nehemiah 13:23–26.

“Never marry an unbeliever.”—*Our High Calling*, p. 257.

“The Lord has in His Word plainly instructed His people not to unite themselves with those who have not His love and fear before them. Such companions will seldom be satisfied with the love and respect which are justly theirs. They will constantly seek to gain from the God-fearing wife or husband some favor which shall involve a disregard of the divine requirements. To a godly man, and to the church with which he is connected, a worldly wife or a worldly friend is as a spy in the camp, who will watch every opportunity to betray the servant of Christ, and expose him to the enemy’s attacks.”—*The Signs of the Times*, September 27, 1910.

- b. What should Christians prayerfully consider when seeking a spouse? 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; 1 Corinthians 7:39.

“In ancient times marriage engagements were generally made by the parents, and this was the custom among those who worshiped God. None were required to marry those whom they could not love; but in the bestowal of their affections the youth were guided by the judgment of their experienced, God-fearing parents. It was regarded as a dishonor to parents, and even a crime, to pursue a course contrary to this.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 171.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What knowledge better equips future parents to give children a strong foundation?
2. What types of circumstances make childbearing inadvisable?
3. Explain the secret of how God-fearing integrity is developed.
4. Why is it so important to be vigilant about associations formed in youth?
5. What guidelines are important in choosing a spouse?

For the Good Samaritan Rest Home in North Brazil

“Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation” (Psalm 71:18).

The Good Samaritan Rest Home and Elderly Living Facility, an institution of ASCENBRA (the Central Brazilian Field Conference), is located in the municipality of Padre Bernardo in the state of Goiás. It is about 21 miles (34 km) from Brasília, the nation’s capital. This institution was originally founded in 2003 in a remote location and was later moved to its current location in order to facilitate transportation for those residents requiring medical assistance. Right now we have 30 residents and 12 professionals (nurses, nursing technicians, caretakers of the elderly and sanitation personnel). From the time the institution first opened, several new souls have been baptized as a result of learning the message during their stay as residents. The rest home accommodates many elderly church members who find themselves in difficulty or whose relatives are unable to provide them with proper care. There are also senior citizens sent by public institutions who refer people to this facility because of its quality.



We now have a major project under construction—a new facility measuring 21,226 ft² (1,972 m²) dedicated especially to this important ministry. The new building is expected to meet the current demand and may even expand the number of residents of the rest home from 30 to 40. We will have new, more comfortable beds, more space for socializing, and a better structure in order for professionals to provide an even higher level of care.

The work is already in progress, but we are facing a big financial challenge since it is budgeted at about US\$650,000. We believe that our wonderful God is at the forefront of this work and we urgently need the collaboration of our brothers, sisters and friends in order to bring it to completion. Therefore, for this first Sabbath offering, we ask that you please remember this noble branch of the welfare ministry being carried out by our church.

In confidence that we can count on you all, we express here our sincere gratitude.

The Good Samaritan Welfare Ministry, North Brazilian Union

Weakness Into Strength

“Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).

“Physically [Samson] was the strongest man upon the earth; but in self-control, integrity, and firmness, he was the weakest of men.”—*The Signs of the Times*, October 13, 1881.

Suggested Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 563–568.

Sunday

February 25

1. REAPING WHAT WAS SOWN

- a. What bitter fruit immediately became apparent in Samson’s marriage with an unbeliever? Judges 14:7, 10, 20.

“[Samson] did not ask whether he could better glorify God when united with the object of his choice, or whether he was placing himself in a position where he could not fulfill the purpose to be accomplished by his life. To all who seek first to honor Him, God has promised wisdom; but there is no promise to those who are bent upon self-pleasing. . . .

“At his marriage feast Samson was brought into familiar association with those who hated the God of Israel. Whoever voluntarily enters into such relations will feel it necessary to conform, to some degree, to the habits and customs of his companions. The time thus spent is worse than wasted. Thoughts are entertained and words are spoken that tend to break down the strongholds of principle and to weaken the citadel of the soul.

“The wife, to obtain whom Samson had transgressed the command of God, proved treacherous to her husband before the close of the marriage feast. Incensed at her perfidy, Samson forsook her for the time, and went alone to his home at Zorah. When, afterward relenting, he returned for his bride, he found her the wife of another.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 563.

2. HUMANITY RESISTING GOD'S GRACE

- a. How did Samson's revenge on the Philistines show a sample of the unique strength God gave him for Israel's deliverance? Judges 15:4–8, 13–15.
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- b. How long did Samson rule as a judge in Israel? Judges 15:20. How did the people show how human nature often hinders God's plans?
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“Had the Israelites been ready to unite with Samson and follow up the victory, they might at this time have freed themselves from the power of their oppressors. But they had become dispirited and cowardly. They had neglected the work which God commanded them to perform, in dispossessing the heathen, and had united with them in their degrading practices, tolerating their cruelty, and, so long as it was not directed against themselves, even countenancing their injustice. When themselves brought under the power of the oppressor, they tamely submitted to the degradation which they might have escaped, had they only obeyed God. Even when the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, they would, not infrequently, desert him and unite with their enemies.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 564.

- c. Despite Samson's apostasy, how did God show him mercy? Judges 16:1–3.
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“Samson had transgressed the command of God by taking a wife from the Philistines, and again he ventured among them—now his deadly enemies—in the indulgence of unlawful passion. Trusting to his great strength, which had inspired the Philistines with such terror, he went boldly to Gaza, to visit a harlot of that place. The inhabitants of the city learned of his presence, and they were eager for revenge. Their enemy was shut safely within the walls of the most strongly fortified of all their cities; they felt sure of their prey, and only waited till the morning to complete their triumph. At midnight Samson was aroused. The accusing voice of conscience filled him with remorse, as he remembered that he had broken his vow as a Nazarite. But notwithstanding his sin, God's mercy had not forsaken him. His prodigious strength again served to deliver him.”—*Ibid.*, p. 565.

3. THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

- a. In what sin was Samson becoming entangled? Judges 16:4–6; Galatians 6:8. How did this sin work his ruin?
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“[Samson] did not again venture among the Philistines, but he continued to seek those sensuous pleasures that were luring him to ruin. . . . The vale of Sorek was celebrated for its vineyards; these also had a temptation for the wavering Nazarite, who had already indulged in the use of wine, thus breaking another tie that bound him to purity and to God. The Philistines kept a vigilant watch over the movements of their enemy, and when he degraded himself by this new attachment, they determined, through Delilah, to accomplish his ruin.

“A deputation consisting of one leading man from each of the Philistine provinces was sent to the vale of Sorek. They dared not attempt to seize him while in possession of his great strength, but it was their purpose to learn, if possible, the secret of his power. They therefore bribed Delilah to discover and reveal it.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 565.

- b. What warnings should we heed from the downward spiral into which Samson was falling? Proverbs 5:21, 22; 7:10, 22, 23; Romans 13:14.
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“Samson’s infatuation seems almost incredible. At first he was not so wholly enthralled as to reveal the secret; but he had deliberately walked into the net of the betrayer of souls, and its meshes were drawing closer about him at every step.”—*The Signs of the Times*, October 13, 1881.

“In the society of this enchantress, the judge of Israel squandered precious hours that should have been sacredly devoted to the welfare of his people. But the blinding passions which make even the strongest weak, had gained control of reason and of conscience.”—*Ibid*.

“Samson in his peril had the same source of strength as had Joseph. He could choose the right or wrong as he pleased. But instead of taking hold of the strength of God, he permitted the wild passions of his nature to have full sway. The reasoning powers were perverted, the morals corrupted. God had called Samson to a position of great responsibility, honor, and usefulness; but he must first learn to govern by first learning to obey the laws of God.”—*Ibid*.

4. THE BOTTOM OF THE PIT

- a. What bitter results followed Samson’s spiritual weakness? Judges 16:15–21.**

“When he had been shaven, Delilah began to annoy him and cause him pain, thus making a trial of his strength; for the Philistines dared not approach him till fully convinced that his power was gone. Then they seized him and, having put out both his eyes, they took him to Gaza. Here he was bound with fetters in their prison house and confined to hard labor.

“What a change to him who had been the judge and champion of Israel!—now weak, blind, imprisoned, degraded to the most menial service! Little by little he had violated the conditions of his sacred calling. God had borne long with him; but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, the Lord departed from him. There was no virtue in his long hair merely, but it was a token of his loyalty to God; and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 566.

- b. How can Samson’s response to the most discouraging hour in his life bring hope to each one of us? Luke 5:32.**

“In suffering and humiliation, a sport for the Philistines, Samson learned more of his own weakness than he had ever known before; and his afflictions led him to repentance.”—*Ibid.*

- c. What began to happen to Samson physically, showing God’s amazing mercy toward sinners? Judges 16:22. What attitude was beginning to take hold of Samson? Mark 9:24.**

“[Samson’s] hair began gradually to grow, indicating the return of his extraordinary powers.”—*The Signs of the Times*, October 13, 1881.

5. THE TRIUMPH OF GOD'S MERCY

- a. How and why did Satan mock at the disgraceful condition of God's broken deliverer? Judges 16:23–25.
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“As the Philistines exulted over their great victory, they ascribed the honor to their gods, praising them as superior to the God of Israel. The contest, instead of being between Samson and the Philistines, was now between Jehovah and Dagon.”—*The Signs of the Times*, October 13, 1881.

- b. What deliberate request did Samson make to the one leading him by the hand? What prayer did Samson breathe to God? Judges 16:26–28.
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“After a time, as if weary, Samson asked permission to rest against the two central pillars which supported the temple roof. Then he silently uttered the prayer, ‘O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines.’”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 567.

- c. What did God use to impart saving faith to Samson? In what “hall of fame” is this frail man included? Judges 16:30; Hebrews 11:32, 33.
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PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why should the outcome of Samson's marriage be no surprise?
2. To what spiritual path did the marriage lead Samson?
3. How is the history of Samson and Delilah repeated in various ways today?
4. What change did Samson make after the loss of his eyes?
5. How and why did God bless Samson's prayer at the end of his life?

Asked of the Lord

“Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:20).

“The mother’s daily influence upon her children is preparing them for everlasting life or eternal death. She exercises in her home a power more decisive than the minister in the desk, or even the king upon his throne. The day of God will reveal how much the world owes to godly mothers for men who have been unflinching advocates of truth and reform.”—*Reflecting Christ*, p. 195.

Suggested Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 569–574.

Sunday

March 4

1. BARREN AND BETRAYED

- a. What brought sadness to Hannah, the wife of Elkanah? 1 Samuel 1:1, 2.

“Elkanah’s love for his chosen companion was deep and unchanging; yet a cloud shadowed their domestic happiness. The home was not made joyful by the voice of childhood. At length the strong desire to perpetuate his name led the husband, as it had led many others, to adopt a course which God did not sanction—that of introducing into a family a second wife, to be subordinate to the first. This act was prompted by a lack of faith in God, and was attended with evil results. The peace of the hitherto united and harmonious family was broken. Upon Hannah the blow fell with crushing weight. All happiness seemed forever swept away from her life. She bore her trials uncomplainingly, yet her grief was none the less keen and bitter.

“Penninah, the new wife, was a woman of inferior mind, and of envious and jealous disposition. As the years passed on, and sons and daughters were added to the household, she became proud and self-important, and treated her rival with contempt and insolence.”—*The Signs of the Times*, October 27, 1881.

2. MISJUDGED AND MISUNDERSTOOD

- a. Explain the typical scene with Elkanah's family at the time of the feasts in Shiloh. 1 Samuel 1:3–5.
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“Even amid the sacred festivities connected with the worship of God, the evil spirit that had cursed [Elkanah's] home intruded. After the other sacrifices had been made, it was customary for the peace-offering to be presented. A specified portion of this was given to the priest, and then the offerer, after distributing to each member of his family a share of the remainder, united with them in a solemn yet joyous feast. Upon these occasions, Elkanah gave the mother of his children a portion for herself and for each of her sons and daughters, and then as a token of regard for Hannah, his first and best-loved wife, he gave her a double portion. This excited the envy and jealousy of the second wife, and she boldly asserted her claims to superiority as one highly favored of God; and she tauntingly pointed to the fact that Hannah had no children, as proof of the Lord's displeasure toward her.”—*The Signs of the Times*, October 27, 1881.

- b. Describe the bitter extent of Hannah's suffering. 1 Samuel 1:6, 7.
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“This scene was enacted again and again, not only at the yearly gatherings, but whenever circumstances furnished an opportunity for Peninnah to exalt herself at the expense of her rival. The course of this woman seemed to Hannah, a trial almost beyond endurance. Satan employed her as his agent to harass, and if possible exasperate and destroy one of God's faithful children. At last, as her enemy's taunts were repeated at one of the yearly feasts, Hannah's courage and fortitude gave way. Unable longer to conceal her feelings, she wept without restraint. The expressions of joy on every hand seemed mockery to her. She could not partake of the feast.”—*Ibid.*

- c. How did Elkanah try to comfort his dear wife, but in vain? 1 Samuel 1:8.
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“It was impossible for Elkanah fully to understand [Hannah's] feelings or to appreciate the cause.”—*Ibid.*

3. FAITHFUL AND GRACIOUS

- a. **What should we learn from Hannah's character and the solution she sought for her difficulty? 1 Samuel 1:9–11; Psalm 50:15.**
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“Humility, conscientiousness, and a firm reliance upon God, were ruling traits in [Hannah's] character.”—*The Signs of the Times*, October 27, 1881.

“Hannah brought no reproach against her husband for his unwise marriage. The grief which she could share with no earthly friend, she carried to her Heavenly Father, and sought consolation from Him alone. . . . There is a mighty power in prayer. Our great adversary is constantly seeking to keep the troubled soul away from God. An appeal to Heaven by the humblest saint is more to be dreaded by Satan than the decrees of cabinets or the mandates of kings.

“Hannah's prayer was unheard by mortal ear, but entered the ear of the Lord of hosts.”—*Ibid.*

- b. **After being misjudged through the malice of her rival, how was Hannah now misjudged by the high priest in the house of God? 1 Samuel 1:12–14.**
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“Feasting revelry had well-nigh supplanted true godliness among the people of Israel. Instances of intemperance, even among women, were of frequent occurrence, and now Eli determined to administer what he considered a deserved rebuke.”—*Ibid.*

- c. **How does Hannah's noble response reveal the abundant grace of a Christlike character? 1 Samuel 1:15, 16.**
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“Hannah had been communing with God. She believed that her prayer had been heard, and the peace of Christ filled her heart. Hers was a gentle, sensitive nature, yet she yielded neither to grief nor to indignation at the unjust charge of drunkenness in the house of God. With due reverence for the anointed of the Lord, she calmly repelled the accusation and stated the cause of her emotion.”—*Ibid.*

4. SAMUEL'S FIRST THREE YEARS

- a. What miracle did the Lord grant in answer to Hannah's prayer? 1 Samuel 1:17–20.
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- b. What should we learn from the thoroughness of Hannah's instruction of young Samuel? Proverbs 22:6.
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"During the first three years of the life of Samuel the prophet, his mother carefully taught him to distinguish between good and evil. By every familiar object surrounding him she sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator."—*Child Guidance*, p. 197.

"The first three years is the time in which to bend the tiny twig. Mothers should understand the importance attaching to this period. It is then that the foundation is laid."—*Ibid.*, p. 194.

"It was Hannah, the woman of prayer and self-sacrifice and heavenly inspiration, who gave birth to Samuel, the heaven-instructed child, the incorruptible judge, the founder of Israel's sacred schools."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 372.

- c. What should we learn from Hannah about the seriousness of vows made to God? 1 Samuel 1:11, 21–28; Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5.
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"As soon as the little one was old enough to be separated from his mother, she fulfilled her vow. She loved her child with all the devotion of a mother's heart; day by day, as she watched his expanding powers and listened to his childish prattle, her affections entwined about him more closely. He was her only son, the special gift of Heaven; but she had received him as a treasure consecrated to God, and she would not withhold from the Giver His own.

"Once more Hannah journeyed with her husband to Shiloh and presented to the priest, in the name of God, her precious gift."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 570, 571.

5. A SONG OF PRAISE AND PROPHECY

- a. What was Hannah led to publicly declare with power? 1 Samuel 2:1.
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“[Hannah] felt that she could do no less in token of her gratitude than to make a public acknowledgment of the divine mercy and loving-kindness. The spirit of inspiration came upon her, and although a retiring and timid woman, her voice was now heard in the assembly of the people, sounding forth the praise of God. . . .

“The horn is in some animals the weapon of attack and defense; by the use of this figure, Hannah would acknowledge that her deliverance had come from God. In her exultation, there is no vain triumph of self. She rejoices not in Samuel, not in her own prosperity, but in the Lord.”—*The Signs of the Times*, October 27, 1881.

- b. How do Hannah’s words bring us comfort and wisdom? 1 Samuel 2:2–10.
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“[1 Samuel 2:3 quoted.] While here referring to Peninnah’s boastful and insolent conduct, Hannah seems also to speak to all the enemies of true godliness, who glory in themselves, and insult and despise the children of faith. Pride and boasting cannot deceive God. He is acquainted with the hearts and the lives of all. By Him actions are weighed. He distinguishes men’s characters, and weighs their motives in the balance. When He sees that it will be for the good of man and for His own glory, He will interpose in behalf of His people. In due time He will reward the righteous and punish the wicked.”—*Ibid*.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do many too often repeat the same type of mistake as Elkanah did?
2. What should we do about the “Peninnah’s” in our life?
3. In what ways might I be guilty of misjudging someone I know?
4. Explain the work of parents during the first three years of a child’s life.
5. What prompted Hannah to make the public declaration that she did?

A Consecrated Child

“Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right” (Proverbs 20:11).

“The Lord accepted Samuel from his very childhood, because his heart was pure. He was given to God, a consecrated offering, and the Lord made him a channel of light.”—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 537.

Suggested Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 575-580.

Sunday

March 11

1. CALLED TO SERVICE

- a. What did Samuel do in his new life in the temple? 1 Samuel 2:11, 18. What did Hannah do for Samuel, and how did God bless Hannah? 1 Samuel 2:19-21.

“It was not customary for the Levites to enter upon their peculiar services until they were twenty-five years of age, but Samuel had been an exception to this rule. Every year saw more important trusts committed to him; and while he was yet a child, a linen ephod was placed upon him as a token of his consecration to the work of the sanctuary. Young as he was when brought to minister in the tabernacle, Samuel had even then duties to perform in the service of God, according to his capacity. These were at first very humble, and not always pleasant; but they were performed to the best of his ability, and with a willing heart.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 573.

“When separated from her child, the faithful mother’s solicitude did not cease. He was the subject of her prayers. Every year she made him a little coat, and when she came with her husband to the yearly sacrifice, she presented it to the child as a token of her love. With every stitch of that coat she had breathed a prayer that he might be pure, noble, and true. She did not ask that he might be great, but earnestly pleaded that he might be good.”—*The Signs of the Times*, November 3, 1881.

2. WITH ELI AND HIS FAMILY

- a. What is written about Samuel in his youth? 1 Samuel 2:26. What was the relationship between the child Samuel and Eli, the high priest?
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“Samuel had been placed under the care of Eli, and the loveliness of his character drew forth the warm affection of the aged priest. He was kind, generous, obedient, and respectful. Eli, pained by the waywardness of his own sons, found rest and comfort and blessing in the presence of his charge. Samuel was helpful and affectionate, and no father ever loved his child more tenderly than did Eli this youth. It was a singular thing that between the chief magistrate of the nation and the simple child so warm an affection should exist. As the infirmities of age came upon Eli, and he was filled with anxiety and remorse by the profligate course of his own sons, he turned to Samuel for comfort.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 573.

- b. Although young Samuel was living on the premises of the high priest, what should we realize about the environment there? What serious warning was given to Eli? 1 Samuel 2:12, 22, 27–31.
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“Samuel’s youth was passed in the tabernacle solemnly devoted to the worship of God; yet even here he was not free from evil influences or sinful example. The sons of Eli are described in the sacred word as ‘sons of Belial.’ They feared not God, nor honored their father; but Samuel did not seek their company nor follow their evil ways. It was his constant effort to make himself what God would have him to become. This is the privilege of every youth. God is pleased when even little children devote themselves to His service; they should not be discouraged in their efforts to become Christians. . . .

“The youngest child that loves and fears God, is greater in His sight than the most talented and learned man who neglects the great salvation.”—*The Signs of the Times*, November 3, 1881.

“Despite the many sovereigns to whom men profess allegiance, all mankind are serving one of two masters—the Prince of light or the Prince of darkness. Samuel served the former, the sons of Eli the latter.”—*Ibid.*

3. OBEDIENCE AS A MERE OPTION?

- a. Explain the problem of Eli and how we might be guilty of repeating the same mistake today. 1 Samuel 2:22–25; Isaiah 3:12 (first part).
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“Eli was quick to see and rebuke the sins and errors of the people, sometimes, as in the case of Hannah, even administering unjust reproof; but the sins of his own sons seemed to him less offensive than the sins of others. In his undue affection he was ever ready to find excuses for their perverse course.”—*The Signs of the Times*, November 24, 1881.

“Eli had instructed his children in the law of God, and had given them a good example in his own life; but this was not his whole duty. God required him, both as a father and as a priest, to restrain them from following their own perverse will. This he had failed to do.”—*Ibid.*, November 10, 1881.

“[Eli] did not enforce obedience.”—*The Review and Herald*, August 30, 1881.

- b. What do we need to realize when we see spiritual weakness in our children? Proverbs 26:2; Deuteronomy 6:6, 7.
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“In every earnest Christian heart the question rises, ‘Why, oh, why, in a land of Bibles and Christian teaching, can the adversary of souls exert over our youth a power so mighty, so unrestrained?’ The reason is apparent. Parents are neglecting their solemn responsibility. They are not earnest, persevering, and faithful in the work of training their children for God, restraining their evil desires and enforcing obedience to parental authority, even in infancy.”—*The Signs of the Times*, November 3, 1881.

“The mother should not allow her child to gain an advantage over her in a single instance; and, in order to maintain this authority, it is not necessary to resort to harsh measures; a firm, steady hand and a kindness which convinces the child of your love will accomplish the purpose. . . .

“Never should they [the children] be allowed to show their parents disrespect. Self-will should never be permitted to go unrebuked. The future well-being of the child requires kindly, loving, but firm discipline.”—*Child Guidance*, p. 83.

4. WORTHY OF A HIGH CALLING

- a. **In contrast to Eli's sons, what can every child learn from the experience of little Samuel at the temple? Proverbs 20:11; Psalm 71:17.**
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"If children were taught to regard the humble round of everyday duties as the course marked out for them by the Lord, as a school in which they were to be trained to render faithful and efficient service, how much more pleasant and honorable would their work appear. To perform every duty as unto the Lord, throws a charm around the humblest employment and links the workers on earth with the holy beings who do God's will in heaven."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 574.

- b. **Why can we be inspired by the way Samuel was a tremendous witness to the aged Eli, and how only was this possible? 2 Corinthians 2:14–17.**
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"While Eli's heart was filled with anxiety and remorse by the evil course of his sons, he found relief and comfort in the integrity and devotion of the youthful Samuel. His ready helpfulness and unvarying fidelity lightened the burdens of the careworn priest. Eli loved Samuel; for he saw that the grace and love of God rested upon him. . . .

"As Samuel grew older, the anxiety of his parents in his behalf became more intense. Many were the petitions offered that he might not be contaminated by the wickedness reported concerning the sons of Eli."—*The Signs of the Times*, December 15, 1881.

- c. **Relate the amazing story of God's call to Samuel. 1 Samuel 3:1–10.**
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"When but twelve years old, the son of Hannah received his special commission from the Most High. . . . Three times Samuel was called, and thrice he responded in like manner; and then Eli was convinced that the mysterious call was the voice of God. What feelings must have stirred the heart of the high priest at that hour! God had passed by his chosen servant, the man of hoary hairs, to commune with a child."—*Ibid.*

5. A MESSAGE TO MAKE EARS TINGLE

- a. **What message did God give to Samuel and how did the boy feel about delivering it? 1 Samuel 3:12–15.**
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“Samuel had not been ignorant of the wicked course pursued by the sons of Eli, but he was filled with fear and amazement that the Lord should commit to him so terrible a message. He arose in the morning and went about his duties as usual, but with a heavy burden on his young heart. How earnestly did he long for the sympathy and counsel of his parents in that trying hour! The Lord had not commanded him to reveal the fearful denunciation to the priest or to his sons; hence he remained silent, avoiding as far as possible the presence of Eli. He trembled, lest some question would compel him to declare the divine judgments against one whom he so loved and revered.”—*The Signs of the Times*, December 15, 1881.

- b. **Respectful and obedient as ever, what did Samuel soon have to do? What should we consider as we reflect on the message given? 1 Samuel 3:18.**
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“In every age, God’s judgments have been visited upon the earth because men transgressed His law. What, then, have we to expect as we behold the wickedness which prevails at the present day? . . . Many of the acknowledged leaders in the church and in the nation, break, and teach others to break that law, as sacred to God as His own throne and name. It is time for the Lord Himself to assert His authority in the earth. . . . He removes His protecting, providential care, and visits His judgments upon the children of men.”—*Ibid.*

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. **Although left alone at the temple without his parents, why was Samuel safe?**
2. **Why was Eli able to appreciate Samuel so much?**
3. **How can parents be like Eli today?**
4. **Name some of the keys to Samuel’s purity in the corrupt temple court.**
5. **What shows the accountability that God expects in all ages?**

From Ichabod to Ebenezer

“Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him”
(1 Samuel 7:9, last part).

“Samuel endeavored to impress upon Israel the fact that they themselves had something to do to secure the divine favor. They must repent of their sins and put away their idols.”—*The Signs of the Times*, January 26, 1882.

Suggested Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 581, 591.
Testimonies, vol. 4, pp. 516, 517.

Sunday

March 18

1. IMPENDING WOE UPON THE NATION

- a. For what gift did faithful Samuel become renowned? 1 Samuel 3:19, 21.

- b. Meanwhile, although Eli had bowed in humble submission to the rebuke against his household, how did God view the situation? Ecclesiastes 8:11.

“Eli did not manifest the fruits of true repentance. He confessed his guilt, but failed to renounce the sin. Year after year the Lord delayed His threatened judgments. Much might have been done in those years to redeem the failures of the past, but the aged priest took no effective measures to correct the evils that were polluting the sanctuary of the Lord. . . . The warnings were disregarded by the people, as they had been by the priests. The people of surrounding nations also, who were not ignorant of the iniquities openly practiced in Israel, became still bolder in their idolatry and crime. They felt no sense of guilt for their sins, as they would have felt had the Israelites preserved their integrity. But a day of retribution was approaching. God’s authority had been set aside, and His worship neglected and despised, and it became necessary for Him to interpose, that the honor of His name might be maintained.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 582, 583.

2. SUMMONING A SYMBOL

- a. **What foolish decision did Israel make when in a weak spiritual state, and who was responsible for this decision? 1 Samuel 4:2, 4.**
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“This expedition [of going out against the Philistines to battle] was undertaken by the Israelites without counsel from God, without the concurrence of high priest or prophet. [1 Samuel 4:2 quoted.] As the shattered and disheartened force returned to their encampment, ‘the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines?’ (1 Samuel 4:3). The nation was ripe for the judgment of God, yet they did not see that their own sins had been the cause of this terrible disaster.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 583.

“Instead of confessing and forsaking the sins that had brought defeat upon them, [the Israelites] now set about devising some other means by which to obtain the victory. Then they thought of the ark of God. What wonders had been wrought when the priests bore it before the people into Jordan! How its waters parted, leaving a safe path for that vast company! They remembered also how it was borne about the city of Jericho seven days in solemn silence, and then as the trumpets pealed, and the people gave a great shout, the massive walls fell flat upon the earth.

“The recollection of these glorious triumphs inspired all Israel with fresh hope and courage.”—*The Signs of the Times*, December 22, 1881.

- b. **What shows the misunderstanding the people had about the ark, and how might we fall into the same trap today? 1 Samuel 4:5.**
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“[Israel] did not consider that it was the law of God which alone gave to the ark its sacredness, and that its presence would bring them prosperity only as they obeyed that law. . . .

“Yet we see a similar blindness and inattention on the part of many at the present day. . . . God has given to modern Israel warnings, counsel, and reproof, to bring them to repentance and reformation of life. But too often these produce but a momentary impression. The persons warned soon return to their own ways. . . . It is one thing to acknowledge the claims of God’s law, and quite another thing to render faithful and willing obedience to all its requirements.”—*Ibid.*

3. MISGUIDED CONFIDENCE

- a. With what regard did the Philistines hold the ark? What was the outcome of the battle? 1 Samuel 4:6, 10. Why did the ark not help Israel?
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“[Israel] overlooked the distinction between the divine presence vouchsafed to an obedient and believing people, and the ark, which was but a symbol of that presence. Hence they confidently looked to the ark for those blessings which God alone could bestow. They saw not the wide contrast between the condition of Israel when the Lord wrought so mightily in their behalf, and their present state.

“They were then walking in obedience to God. The ark was borne by holy men in accordance with His express command, and the Captain of the Lord’s host went before the repository of His law. Then His arm brought deliverance for them. But they were now following their own plans, in opposition to the divine counsel and authority. The ark was borne by sons of Belial who were doomed to destruction. Yet the people were so infatuated by Satan as to imagine they could induce God to fight for them, when the law under the mercy-seat condemned them to defeat, disaster, and death!”—*The Signs of the Times*, December 22, 1881.

“God permitted His ark to be taken by their enemies to show Israel how vain it was to trust in the ark, the symbol of His presence, while they were profaning the commandments contained in the ark. God would humble them by removing from them that sacred ark, their boasted strength and confidence.”—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, p. 106.

- b. What tragedies highlighted the woe of this defeat? 1 Samuel 4:11, 15–22.
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“The Lord sorely chastised His people Israel, revealing their hypocrisy and rebuking their presumption, and thus left upon the pages of history the testimony for all future ages, that the iniquities of His professed people will not go unpunished. The greater the knowledge of God’s will, the greater the sin of those who disregard it. God is not dependent upon men to cause His name to be feared and honored in the earth. He accepts the labors of those who walk in faithfulness and humility before Him, but He will reject all who profess to serve Him, and yet follow in the course of the unrighteous.”—*The Signs of the Times*, December 22, 1881.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY BEFORE GOD

- a. **In the judgment that befell the house of Eli, what solemn warning should we heed from the way history repeats itself? Matthew 7:19, 23; Isaiah 58:1.**
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“Eli was gentle, loving, and kind, and had a true interest in the service of God and the prosperity of His cause. He was a man who had power in prayer. He never rose up in rebellion against the words of God. But he was wanting; he did not have firmness of character to reprove sin and execute justice against the sinner so that God could depend upon him to keep Israel pure. He did not add to his faith the courage and power to say No at the right time and in the right place. Sin is sin; righteousness is righteousness. The trumpet note of warning must be sounded. We are living in a fearfully wicked age. The worship of God will become corrupted unless there are wide-awake men at every post of duty. It is no time now for any to be absorbed in selfish ease. Not one of the words which God has spoken must be allowed to fall to the ground.

“While some in Battle Creek have professedly believed the *Testimonies*, they have been trampling them under their feet. But few have read them with interest; but few have heeded them. The indulgence of self, pride, fashion, and display are mingled with the worship of God. He wants brave men for action, who will not regard the setting up of idols and the coming in of abominations without lifting up the voice like a trumpet, showing the people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 517.

“Warnings and reproofs are not given to the erring among Seventh-day Adventists because their lives are more blameworthy than are the lives of professed Christians of the nominal churches, nor because their example or their acts are worse than those of the Adventists who will not yield obedience to the claims of God’s law, but because they have great light, and have by their profession taken their position as God’s special, chosen people, having the law of God written in their hearts.”—*Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 452.

- b. **As the Philistines were cursed by stealing the symbol of a God they did not worship, how long was it before they returned the ark? How long was it before Israel would value again the sacred symbol? 1 Samuel 6:1; 7:1, 2.**

5. A MIRACLE OF MERCY

- a. What earnest appeal did Samuel bring to the people of Israel and with what beautiful results? 1 Samuel 7:3, 6.
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“As soon as Samuel began to judge Israel, even in his youth, he called an assembly of the people for fasting and prayer, and deep humiliation before God. He bore his solemn testimony from the mouth of God. The people then began to learn where their strength was.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 517.

- b. What should we learn from how God was gracious to humbled Israel? Why should we search our hearts as they did? 1 Samuel 7:7, 10, 12.
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“The condition of God’s people at the present day is similar to that of idolatrous Israel. Many who bear the name of Christians are serving other gods besides the Lord. Our Creator demands our supreme devotion, our first allegiance. Anything which tends to abate our love for God, or to interfere with the service due Him, becomes thereby an idol. With some their lands, their houses, their merchandise, are the idols. Business enterprises are prosecuted with zeal and energy, while the service of God is made a secondary consideration. Family worship is neglected, secret prayer forgotten. Many claim to deal justly with their fellowmen, and seem to feel that in so doing they discharge their whole duty. But it is not enough to keep the last six commandments of the decalogue. We are to love the Lord our God with all the heart. Nothing short of obedience to every precept—nothing less than supreme love to God as well as equal love to our fellowmen—can satisfy the claims of the divine law.”—*The Signs of the Times*, January 26, 1882.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is it not enough to submit to reproof?
2. Why wasn’t the presence of the ark helpful on the battlefield?
3. What was the significance of the word “Ichabod” in Israel’s history?
4. Eli was a man of prayer, but what was lacking in his spirituality?
5. How are we—like Israel—in need of a “Mizpeh” experience today?

The Last Judge of Israel

“And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).

“Samuel . . . wielded a more powerful influence than [Saul], because his record was one of faithfulness, obedience, and devotion.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 663.

Suggested Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 592, 615.

Sunday

March 25

1. SECRETS FOR VICTORY

- a. What insights can we learn from Israel's experience during the time that Samuel judged the nation? 1 Samuel 7:12, 17.
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“There is need today of such a revival of true heart-religion as was experienced by ancient Israel. We need, like them, to bring forth fruit meet for repentance—to put away our sins, cleansing the defiled temple of the heart that Jesus may reign within. . . .

“Repentance is the first step which must be taken by all who would return to God. No one can do this work for us. We must individually humble our souls before God, and put away our idols. When we have done all that we can do, the Lord will manifest to us his salvation.

“And when the light of Heaven dispels our darkness, let us, like Samuel, evince our gratitude by making a memorial to God.”—*The Signs of the Times*, January 26, 1882.

- b. Why must there be earnest appeals to God's professed people until the end of time? Isaiah 2:17–22.
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2. AN ESSENTIAL STEP

- a. What caused the downfall of God's people? Hosea 4:6. What did Samuel do to bring about enduring spiritual growth among the people?
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“Provision was made for the instruction of the young, by the establishment of the schools of the prophets. If a youth desired to search deeper into the truths of the word of God and to seek wisdom from above, that he might become a teacher in Israel, these schools were open to him. The schools of the prophets were founded by Samuel to serve as a barrier against the widespread corruption, to provide for the moral and spiritual welfare of the youth, and to promote the future prosperity of the nation by furnishing it with men qualified to act in the fear of God as leaders and counselors. In the accomplishment of this object Samuel gathered companies of young men who were pious, intelligent, and studious. These were called the sons of the prophets. As they communed with God and studied His word and His works, wisdom from above was added to their natural endowments. The instructors were men not only well versed in divine truth, but those who had themselves enjoyed communion with God and had received the special endowment of His Spirit. They enjoyed the respect and confidence of the people, both for learning and piety.

“In Samuel's day there were two of these schools—one at Ramah, the home of the prophet, and the other at Kirjath-jearim, where the ark then was. Others were established in later times.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 593.

- b. What is to be the keynote of such schools? Isaiah 34:16; Psalm 12:6.
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“We are willing that the whole world should know, not only that our youth are educated in the sciences, but that they have continually kept before them the importance of obtaining a knowledge of the laws of God, and of rendering obedience to them.”—*College Record*, January 1, 1878.

“Are there not some lessons which the educators of our day might learn with profit from the ancient schools of the Hebrews? He who created man has provided for his development in body and mind and soul. Hence, real success in education depends upon the fidelity with which men carry out the Creator's plan.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595.

3. SAMUEL DISAPPOINTED

- a. **What disappointment did Samuel face in his old age? 1 Samuel 8:1–3. To some extent, how was he treated a bit unfairly?**
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“Divinely invested with the threefold office of judge, prophet, and priest, [Samuel] had labored with untiring and disinterested zeal for the welfare of his people, and the nation had prospered under his wise control. Order had been restored, and godliness promoted, and the spirit of discontent was checked for the time. But with advancing years the prophet was forced to share with others the cares of government, and he appointed his two sons to act as his assistants. While Samuel continued the duties of his office at Ramah, the young men were stationed at Beersheba, to administer justice among the people near the southern border of the land.

“It was with the full assent of the nation that Samuel had appointed his sons to office.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 604.

“The people saw that [Samuel’s] sons did not follow his footsteps. Although they were not vile, like the children of Eli, yet they were dishonest and double-minded. While they aided their father in his laborious work, their love of reward led them to favor the cause of the unrighteous.”—*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 353.

“The cases of abuse among the people had not been referred to Samuel. Had the evil course of his sons been known to him, he would have removed them without delay; but this was not what the petitioners desired. Samuel saw that their real motive was discontent and pride.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 604.

- b. **Instead of requesting for the wrongs to be corrected, what did the people demand from Samuel? What did he do in response? 1 Samuel 8:4–6.**
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“The aged prophet looked upon the request as a censure upon himself, and a direct effort to set him aside. He did not, however, reveal his feelings; he uttered no reproach, but carried the matter to the Lord in prayer and sought counsel from Him alone.”—*Ibid.*, pp. 604, 605.

4. WHO IS TO BE OUR KING?

- a. How did the Lord bid Samuel respond to the people's demand for a king? Why? 1 Samuel 8:7, 18.
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"Those who despise and reject the faithful servant of God show contempt, not merely for the man, but for the Master who sent him. It is God's words, His reproofs and counsel, that are set at naught; it is His authority that is rejected."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 605.

- b. What timeless principle does God want us to glean from this experience, as explained through later prophets? Hosea 13:11; Ezekiel 14:3, 8.
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"The Lord had, through His prophets, foretold that Israel would be governed by a king; but it does not follow that this form of government was best for them or according to His will. . . . When men choose to have their own way, without seeking counsel from God, or in opposition to His revealed will, He often grants their desires, in order that, through the bitter experience that follows, they may be led to realize their folly and to repent of their sin. Human pride and wisdom will prove a dangerous guide. That which the heart desires contrary to the will of God will in the end be found a curse rather than a blessing."—*Ibid.*, pp. 605, 606.

- c. After Saul, the first king, was instated, how did God mercifully seek to make the best of the situation? 1 Samuel 10:1, 6, 9; 15:17.
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- d. What was God finally constrained to do to the first king? Why? 1 Samuel 13:14; 15:22, 23; Acts 13:20, 22. How does He govern His people today? Ephesians 4:11, 16.
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"God has not set any kingly power in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to control the whole body or to control any branch of the work. He has not provided that the burden of leadership shall rest upon a few men. Responsibilities are distributed among a large number of competent men."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 236.

5. A GODLY LEGACY

- a. Name one of the saddest days in the history of Israel and explain why it was so heartrending. 1 Samuel 25:1; Psalm 116:15.
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“The death of Samuel was regarded as an irreparable loss by the nation of Israel. A great and good prophet and an eminent judge had fallen in death, and the grief of the people was deep and heartfelt. . . .

“As the people contrasted the course of Saul with that of Samuel, they saw what a mistake they had made in desiring a king that they might not be different from the nations around them. Many looked with alarm at the condition of society, fast becoming leavened with irreligion and godlessness. . . .

“The nation had lost the founder and president of its sacred schools, but that was not all. It had lost him to whom the people had been accustomed to go with their great troubles—lost one who had constantly interceded with God in behalf of the best interests of its people. The intercession of Samuel had given a feeling of security; for ‘the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much’ (James 5:16). . . .

“It was when the nation was racked with internal strife, when the calm, God-fearing counsel of Samuel seemed to be most needed, that God gave His aged servant rest. Bitter were the reflections of the people as they looked upon his quiet resting place, and remembered their folly in rejecting him as their ruler; for he had had so close a connection with Heaven that he seemed to bind all Israel to the throne of Jehovah. It was Samuel who had taught them to love and obey God.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 663, 664.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did Samuel wisely begin his period as judge of Israel?
2. What revealed his foresight to brighten the future of God’s nation?
3. Both Eli and Samuel had troublesome sons, but what was the difference?
4. Why is it so important to fully surrender to God’s will when we pray?
5. Why should we have a deeper appreciation for leaders like Samuel?

First Sabbath Offerings



JANUARY 6

**Church Building Project in
Targu-Mures, Romania**
(See p. 4.)

FEBRUARY 3
**for World Disasters
and Welfare**
(See p. 25.)



Haiti Disaster Relief



MARCH 3

**For the Good Samaritan
Rest Home in North Brazil**
(See p. 46.)