

Love Stories



SABBATH—MARCH 17

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 2:21–25; Exodus 20:5; Isaiah 43:4; Isaiah 62:5; Song of Solomon; John 2:1–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Lord appeared to us in the past. He said, ‘I have loved you with a love that lasts forever. I have kept on loving you with faithful love’ ” (Jeremiah 31:3, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: How are we to understand the loving side of God?

LOVE IS, PERHAPS, WHAT WE THINK OF FIRST WHEN WE THINK ABOUT GOD. We cannot begin to even guess how deep God's love is. But perhaps there is one part of God's deep love that is overlooked: God is a Romantic.¹

To get a proper understanding of God's romantic (loving) nature, we need to remind ourselves of the time frame of the Bible. This book covers thousands of years of human history, from the first day of this world down to its last before it is remade. And like all history books, the Bible holds records of kings and queens, wars and battle plans, and political plans.

No history book records everything that happened. The same is true of the Bible. One does not find a long, long historical record in the broad period of time that the Bible covers. A lot of things are overlooked. But God does include tender romances (love stories) within the historical record that He gave the prophets (special messengers) to write. The question is, Why would the Lord include these kinds of love stories, or stories of romance, in a history book? Does that tell us something about His own nature (who God is)? And how important romance is to God? This week we will learn why these stories are included and what we can learn from them.

1. romantic—someone who thinks a lot about love and does and says things that show strong feelings of love.

SUNDAY—MARCH 18**THE FIRST ROMANCE
(Genesis 2:23)**

We need to begin with the first chapters of Genesis for the first romance in the Bible. It is the love story of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve are special creations of God. They are the male and female made in His image (Genesis 1:26, 27). Both Adam and Eve receive their life as a result of God's wonderful creative power. This means that our own physical bodies are one of the most powerful testimonies to the wisdom and power of our Creator.

Read the biblical story of the creation of Eve (Genesis 2:21–25). How would you describe the kind of relationship between Adam and Eve as shown in this story?

Perhaps the point here from this story is just how closely tied together Adam and Eve are. God creates the woman out of the body of the man. This means they are of the same flesh and blood.

Adam then breaks into what has been called the Bible's first "love song" or "love poem." In this poem, Adam openly admits just how closely tied he and Eve are to each other. In Hebrew, the word for "man" that he uses in verse 23 is *ish*. The word Adam uses for "woman" is *ishah*. This, again, shows just how closely tied they are to each other.

In verse 24, the Bible says that a man will leave his parents and join his

wife, and they shall be "one flesh." This is another powerful example of the closeness meant for them. (Some have wondered, *What parents is the Bible talking about here, because there were none then?* The point is that Moses wrote this story many centuries after it happened. And he used the story of Adam and Eve's creation to explain in more detail what marriage meant.) Finally, Adam and Eve's nakedness also showed how very close this first couple was.

Whatever else Adam and Eve's relationship originally was, romantic love was certainly a large part of it. In other words, God is not against romance. Not at all. He created us as people with the ability to experience and enjoy love. That seems to be one of the most important parts that God created in us.

Romantic love is such a wonderful, God-given gift to people. If you are in a proper romantic relationship, what things can you do to protect it from all that can go wrong?



God creates the woman out of the body of the man.

MONDAY—MARCH 19**ROMANCES IN THE BIBLE
(Genesis 29)**

The Bible covers a lot of history. But it has taken time to give several examples of romances. For example, it tells of the strong bond (tie) of love between Sarah and Abraham. Because of this bond, Abraham does not leave Sarah the whole time she is childless. Read Genesis 16. Abraham only takes Hagar as a substitute wife so that Abraham and Sarah may have a child because Sarah tells him to. Clearly, the ties of love between Abraham and Sarah are strong.

It takes a long chapter in Genesis to explain the trip that Abraham's servant takes to find Isaac a wife. Upon the servant's return with Rebecca, the Bible includes another love story. Read Genesis 24.

Another romance in the Bible is the one between Jacob and Rachel. The story shows how Jacob reacts quickly and warmly to Rachel. Apart from the Song of Songs, there is not another example in the Bible of a man and a woman kissing, and certainly not before marriage. (Read this story in Genesis 29.)

As the true Author behind the writers of the Bible, God reminds us through the book of Genesis that He is a Romantic. This is because He includes these love stories and this kiss in the Bible.

In the historical part of the book of Genesis, there must be many missed time periods. But God let these warm love stories remain in the Bible.

Go back over the stories of these romances. These stories are in many ways the same as romance and love stories all over the world. These people faced many challenges and suffered from the mistakes of others. What were some of the things done wrong that brought so much pain and suffering to these relationships? Most important, how can we learn from their mistakes?

Unfortunately, many people have made many of the same mistakes, or even worse. The good news is that God forgives and He also heals. Whatever romantic mistakes you have made, how can you learn to find the forgiveness and healing that come from the Cross?



God includes the story of Jacob's kiss to remind us that love is important.

TUESDAY—MARCH 20**GOD'S LOVE (Exodus 20:5)**

Genesis shows, right from the start, that romance is to be an important part of the human experience. One

man with one woman. That is God's ideal, the Bible's model (example) of what romantic love is intended to be.

It is interesting, too, to note how often the Bible uses symbols of love, of marriage, to show the kind of love relationship that God wants to have with His people. Nothing is to be closer than a husband and a wife—except a person's individual relationship with God.

What word in Exodus 20:5 shows God's feelings toward His people? What does that word teach us about God?

Many times God expresses His jealousy over His people. (Read also Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; and Joel 2:18.) Jealousy is a feeling that lovers get when they think that their beloved is not faithful to them. This means that God is not a far-off, non-feeling, impersonal person. He is a Person with much affection (love) for the human family. It may be hard for us to understand this. But God does love us and, like any lover, He is hurt by our unfaithfulness.

Read the following verses: Isaiah 43:4; Isaiah 62:5; Ezekiel 16:1–15; Jeremiah 31:3; and Revelation 21:9. What are they saying? How do they help us to understand God's feelings toward us?

The Bible openly teaches that God deeply loves each human. This is not easy to understand. This is because God, the Creator of the universe, is too big for humans to understand

fully. After all, we cannot understand the universe as a whole. So how can we understand the One who created it? But, at the same time, God has declared His love for us and shown it to us in many powerful ways. The greatest, of course, is the Cross and what happened there. How much more proof of God's love for us do we need than the Cross?

Think what it would mean if God hated us or did not care for us. But the Bible says that God *loves* us. What does that mean to you personally? How does this wonderful idea (that God loves us) influence the way that you live?

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 21

A BOOK OF ROMANCE (Song of Solomon)

Libraries could be filled with books about the difficult question of human suffering. This fact of human suffering is difficult especially for those who believe in a loving and all-powerful God. (For the atheist, suffering is just part of what it means to live in a godless and meaningless universe. So, suffering does not create the difficult philosophical questions for the atheist that it does for the Christian.) But without an understanding of the great controversy (war) between Christ and Satan, most books about the question of human suffering do not do much to help people to understand that suffering. (Even with an understanding of the great war in heaven, the question of

suffering is, in itself, difficult enough.)

Human suffering touches all parts of life. But we must not forget life's pleasures either. Why does food taste so good? Why are so many taste buds perfectly matched to sense the many tempting flavors in food? Why are there so many shades of color? Why is the human eye able to connect with and enjoy all the rich colors? And why do we have the joy of married sexuality? After all, having children certainly does not require the kind of pleasure that sex offers. Some kinds of life simply split in half to reproduce (make children). Imagine if that were what we went through in order to reproduce. Even now, humans sometimes use methods of artificial insemination² that do not involve pleasure. So, why do we have the exact nerve endings needed to enjoy sensory pleasure (hearing, tasting, seeing, touching, smelling), even sexual pleasure?

The answer to all these questions is the same. It is because God has made us that way. God created humans to have bodies that enjoy physical pleasures.

No book of the Bible deals with this topic better than the Song of Solomon. Why is that book in the Bible? It is a book of romantic pleasure. All the sexual pleasures in the book have no connection to childbearing. The book clearly reminds us of the special pleasures that God designed and planned for husbands and wives. It also reminds us that the enjoyable springs of romantic love owe their beginning to God.

Read through the Song of Solomon. What does the book say to you about how God sees the pleasures of the flesh when they are within holy marriage?

In comparison with many of the “modern” ideas and practices (customs) of our culture, Christian ideas about sex, marriage, and physical pleasures may seem old-fashioned and narrow-minded. But these principles (important rules) come from God, who created our physical pleasures. He is the One who knows how they can best be enjoyed. Only God can even begin to understand the pain and suffering caused by abuse of these wonderful gifts.



God created our physical pleasures.

THURSDAY—MARCH 22

JESUS AND ROMANCE (John 2:1–11)

What does John 2:1–11 tell us about Jesus' attitude (feeling) toward marriage and romantic love? What does it mean that He gave His blessing to such lively

2. artificial insemination—a method of planting (putting) a man's sperm into a woman's womb.

and long-lasting Jewish weddings in His day?

Jesus had just returned from the wilderness of temptation. There He Himself had gone through much suffering. But from there He came forth to bless the human family and to make holy the warm relationships of human life. Jesus, who led the first wedding of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, now does His first miracle. Where? At a wedding meal.

A Jewish wedding in Bible times was an impressive event. A marriage in the small village of Cana in Galilee might have been the event of the year. The party went on for days. Rabbis and students stopped studying. Everyone brought presents. And the family of the bride was expected to provide plenty of food and drink, as well as fun and joy, for the guests.

Because of this expectation, running out of drink was more than just a small disappointment. It was a terrible event. So, the mother of Jesus comes to describe the emergency to Him. Then she speaks to the servants of the household, saying, "Whatever He tells you, do it."

Jesus then tells the servants to fill six water pots. Archaeologists say that at that time a storage jar could hold 15–25 gallons. So, if we count all six water pots, we are talking about at least 90 gallons. Some Bible thinkers suggest the total could be at least 120 gallons.

The next thing we hear is the servant's exciting comment to the bridegroom, congratulating him: " ' Everyone

brings out the best wine first. They bring out the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much drink. But you have saved the best until now' " (John 2:10, NIRV).

There are four quarts to a gallon and each quart holds six glasses. This size is usually used at wedding receptions. That means the six water pots hold a minimum total of 2,160 glasses. This means there are 2,160 servings of the finest drink for one little wedding party in a small village of Galilee. Jesus, at a wedding, pours out the best that anyone has ever seen.

In this miracle we can see God's creative power. It is the same power that created our world. And, in Jesus' earthly ministry (work), this power is first shown at a wedding.

Jesus' miracle at a small village wedding teaches us that romantic love and marriage are wonderful gifts from God. We must remember, too, that Jesus was never married. So, He leaves an example that shows that not everyone has to get married. Single people can live full and useful and joyful lives as well as married people can.



In the miracle of the wine, we see the same creative power that created our world.

FRIDAY—MARCH 23

ADDITIONAL STUDY: In both the Old and the New Testament, marriage is a symbol of the holy union (joining) between Christ and His people. To the mind of Jesus, the joy of wedding celebrations points forward to the rejoicing of that day when He shall bring home His bride [His people] to the Father's house. Then the saved shall sit down with the Savior to the marriage supper of the Lamb. He says, "People will not call you Deserted [forgotten]. . . . Instead, you will be called The One the Lord Delights In . . . I [the Lord] will take delight in you. . . . As a groom is happy with his bride, I will be full of joy over you" (Isaiah 62:4, 5, NIrV). And in the book of Zephaniah, it says that "the quietness of his love will calm you down. He will sing with joy because of you" (Zephaniah 3:17, NIrV).

The Bible closes with this same glorious (beautiful) theme. After the vision of heavenly things is given to John the apostle (teacher), he writes: "Then I heard the noise of a huge crowd. It sounded like the roar of rushing waters and like loud thunder. The people were shouting, 'Hallelujah! Our Lord God is the King who rules over all. Let us be joyful and glad! Let us give him glory [praise]! It is time for the Lamb's [Jesus'] wedding. His bride [church] has made herself ready. Fine

linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear.' . . . 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' . . . 'These are the true words of God' " (Revelation 19:6–9, NIrV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ What are the practices in your society and culture that could easily lead to the abuse of the physical pleasures that God has given us? How can you help to educate others, especially young people, about the dangers of abusing these gifts? How can you show them that by following the principles (important rules) and laws that God has given us, people will be in a much better situation to enjoy life than they would if they followed the customs and practices of a society that does not follow the principles in God's Word?

❷ In the civil laws that God gave Israel, there is another reminder of God's romantic nature. What kind of honeymoon does God suggest for a newly married couple? Read Deuteronomy 24:5. What do we make of that time frame given to the new couple?

SUMMARY: The Bible says that God is a passionate Lover. Think about the difference that makes for the many doctrines (beliefs) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.