

# Creation *and* Fall



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 1:26, 27; 1 John 4:7, 8, 16; Gen. 3:16–19; Gen. 11:1–9; Gal. 3:29; Deut. 7:6–11.*

**Memory Text:** “Then [God] brought [Abraham] outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (*Genesis 15:5, 6, NKJV*).

The story of God's people starts with the creation of humans and their tragic fall into sin. Any attempt at understanding the nature of unity in the church must begin with God's original plan at the Creation and then the need for restoration after the Fall.

The first chapters of the Bible reveal that God intended for humanity to remain one family. Unfortunately, this unity was severed after the tragedy of sin. In sin alone the roots of disunity and division arose, more of disobedience's foul consequences. We get a hint of this division in the immediate interaction between Adam and Eve when God first approached them after they ate of the forbidden tree (*see Gen. 3:11*). Hence, among all else that the plan of salvation will accomplish, the restoration of this original unity is one crucial goal, as well.

Abraham, the father of God's people, became a key player in God's plan of salvation. Abraham is depicted in Scripture as the great example of “righteousness by faith” (*see Rom. 4:1–5*), the kind of faith that unites God's people with each other and with the Lord Himself. God works through people to restore unity and to make His will known to lost humankind.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 6.

## Love as a Foundation of Unity

A clear message flowing out of the Creation story in Genesis 1 and 2 is the overall harmony that existed at the end of the week of Creation. God’s final words that all was “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*) refer not only to aesthetic beauty but also to the absence of any element of evil or discord when God finished making this world and the humans who were to populate it. God’s original purpose in Creation included the harmonious coexistence and interdependent relationship of all life forms. It was a beautiful world created for the human family. All was perfect and worthy of its Creator. God’s ideal and original purpose for the world was one of harmony, unity, and love.

**Read** Genesis 1:26, 27. What do these verses teach about human uniqueness in contrast to the rest of the earthly creation as depicted in Genesis 1 and 2?

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Genesis says that God created humankind in His image, something not said about anything else in the Genesis Creation account. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;’ . . . So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (*Gen. 1:26, 27, NKJV*). Although theologians have debated for centuries the exact nature of this image, and the nature of God Himself, many passages of Scripture present God’s nature as love.

**Read** 1 John 4:7, 8, 16. How can these verses help us to understand how we were originally created and how this could have impacted the original unity found at the Creation?

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God is love, and because humans also can love (and in ways that the rest of the earthly creation certainly can’t), to be created in His image must include the ability to love. Yet, love can exist only in relationship with others. Thus, whatever else being made in the image of God entails, it must entail the capacity to love, and to love deeply.

## The Consequences of the Fall

The consequences of the Fall were enormous. The disobedience of Adam and Eve started the rupture of a harmonious interdependence between all life forms. Even worse, it started the disunity, discord, and divisions among human beings that exist even today. The disharmony is seen immediately in how Adam and Eve sought to put the blame for the Fall on others (*Gen. 3:12, 13*). Things have become only worse since.

**Read** Genesis 3:16–19 and Genesis 4:1–15. What in these verses reveal the results of sin and its impact on the harmonious world God had created?

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Adam’s disobedience became the source of many events and consequences that over time affected all of God’s creation. The natural world itself began to suffer from the consequences of sin. Human relationships also were affected. Cain and Abel, two brothers who should have loved and cared for each other, were estranged because one wished to follow his own selfish inclinations instead of following God’s prescribed mode of worship. This estrangement resulted in violence and death. Cain’s reaction, however, was more directed at God than at Abel. He felt angry toward God (*Gen. 4:5*), and this anger led to resentment toward Abel. Disobedience further ruptured human relationships.

“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (*Gen. 6:5, NKJV*). This evil ultimately led to the Flood and to the incredible devastation of God’s original creation left in the Flood’s wake. But even then God did not give up on the human race, but left a remnant, Noah and his family, to start again.

After the Flood, God gave a promise to Noah and his family. The rainbow in the sky always would remind them of His care and promises, of His kindness and mercy (*Gen. 9:12–17, Isa. 54:7–10*). God instituted a covenant with Noah and reinstated His original plan to have a united human family faithful to Him and His Word.

**What are the ways that sin brings disharmony? What choices can you make right now to help restore harmony among those whom your choices can impact in a powerful way?**

## Further Disunity and Separation

**Read** Genesis 11:1–9. What happened here that makes the problem of separation and disunity worse?

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The next events chronicled by the Bible after the Flood are the construction of the Tower of Babel, the confusion of languages, and then the dispersion of people, who so far had spoken one language. Perhaps attracted by the beauty of the land between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, and the fertility of the soil, some of the descendants of Noah decided to build themselves a city and a high-towered structure in the land of Shinar, today's southern Iraq (*Gen. 11:2*).

Archaeology has shown that Mesopotamia was a densely populated region from earliest historical times. Among these people were the Sumerians, who are credited with inventing the art of writing on clay tablets. They built well-constructed houses and were masters in the production of jewelry, tools, and household utensils. Excavations also have uncovered many tower-like temples dedicated to the worship of various deities.

The descendants of Noah who settled in the land of Shinar soon forgot the God of Noah and the promises He had made to never again destroy the world by a flood. Building the Tower of Babel was a monument to their superior wisdom and skills. Their desire for renown and reputation, to “make a name for ourselves” (*Gen. 11:4, NKJV*), was one motive for this building project. “According to the divine purpose, men were to have preserved unity through the bond of true religion. When idolatry and polytheism broke this inner spiritual bond, they lost not only unity of religion but also the spirit of brotherhood. A project such as the tower, to preserve by outward means the inward unity which had been lost, could never succeed.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 284, 285.

The fall of Adam and Eve shattered the unity of the human race and God's original plan. It resulted in confusion regarding worship; the widespread dissemination of evil and immorality over the earth; and ultimately the separation of humanity into many different cultures, languages, and races that often have been at odds with one another since.

**What are practical steps we can take to help heal the divisions of race, culture, and language that hurt us even in the church?**

## Abraham, Father of God's People

The three great monotheistic world religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, look to Abraham as their father. For Christians, this association is a spiritual relationship. When called to leave his country in Mesopotamia, Abraham was told that in him “ ‘all the families of the earth shall be blessed’ ” (*Gen. 12:3, NKJV; see also Gen. 18:18, 22:18*). The blessing came through Jesus.

**Read** Hebrews 11:8–19, Romans 4:1–3, and Galatians 3:29. What elements of Abraham's faith do these texts mention, and how do they relate to the idea of Christian unity? That is, what can be found in these texts that can help us today to understand what a crucial component of Christian unity should be?

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As father of all believers, Abraham gives us some of the basic elements central to Christian unity. First, he practiced obedience. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (*Heb. 11:8, NKJV*). Second, he had hope in the promises of God. “By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (*Heb. 11:9, 10, NKJV*). Third, he believed that God would give him a son and that one day his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. On the basis of this response, God justified him by faith (*Rom. 4:1–3*). Fourth, he trusted in God's plan of salvation. The greatest test to Abraham's faith came when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah (*Gen. 22:1–19, Heb. 11:17–19*).

The Old Testament describes Abraham as a friend of God (*2 Chron. 20:7, Isa. 41:8*). His life of faith, his unwavering obedience, and his confidence in God's promises make him an example of what our Christian lives should be now.

**Think about your actions and words over the next few days. In what ways can you seek to make sure that whatever you say or do reflects the reality of your faith?**

## God's Chosen People

In calling Abraham to be His servant, God chose for Himself a people to represent Him to the world. This calling and election was an act of God's love and grace. God's call to Israel was central to His plan for the restoration of all humanity after the devastation and disunity caused by the Fall. Sacred history is the study of God's work toward this restoration, and a major component of that plan was the covenant nation of Israel.

**According to Deuteronomy 7:6–11, why did God call Israel His people? Why did He choose the descendants of Abraham as His people?**

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God's love for humankind is at the center of the election of Israel as His people. God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants in order to preserve the knowledge of God through His people and to bring about the Redemption of humanity (*Ps. 67:2*). Yet, it is a supreme act of love that made God choose Israel. The descendants of Abraham had nothing to boast about to claim God's unmerited love. "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples'" (*Deut. 7:7, NKJV*).

It is a strange reversal of values that God uses to select His people. While humans look at power, wisdom, and self-confidence to select leaders, God does not choose the strong and mighty to serve Him, but those who sense or acknowledge their weakness, folly, and nothingness, that no one might glory before Him (*1 Cor. 1:26–31*).

Yet, look at the privilege that was theirs: "God desired to make of His people Israel a praise and a glory. Every spiritual advantage was given them. God withheld from them nothing favorable to the formation of character that would make them representatives of Himself.

"Their obedience to the law of God would make them marvels of prosperity before the nations of the world. He who could give them wisdom and skill in all cunning work would continue to be their teacher, and would ennoble and elevate them through obedience to His laws. If obedient, they would be preserved from the diseases that afflicted other nations, and would be blessed with vigor of intellect. The glory of God, His majesty and power, were to be revealed in all their prosperity. They were to be a kingdom of priests and princes. God furnished them with every facility for becoming the greatest nation on the earth."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 288.

**What parallels can we find between what God did for ancient Israel and the calling He had for them, and what He has done for us and the calling He has for us as Seventh-day Adventists? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.**

**Further Thought:** Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51; “The Call of Abraham,” pp. 125–131, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

God’s original purpose in the creation of humanity also is reflected in the institutions of the family (*Gen. 2:21–24*) and the Sabbath. The Sabbath was intended for all humanity, as Jesus clearly indicated in Mark 2:27, 28. In fact, its universal nature is seen in the Genesis account itself, when God set aside the seventh day, not only before the calling out of Israel as His covenant people but even before the introduction of sin. What a powerfully unifying force the Sabbath could have been if all people had kept it. It was the day of rest God intended to remind the descendants of Adam and Eve of their common bond to Him and to one another. “The Sabbath and the family were alike instituted in Eden, and in God’s purpose they are indissolubly linked together. On this day more than on any other, it is possible for us to live the life of Eden. It was God’s plan for the members of the family to be associated in work and study, in worship and recreation, the father as priest of his household, and both father and mother as teachers and companions of their children.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 535.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does the Genesis account of the creation of the woman from the side of Adam reveal the close and intimate bond that should exist between a husband and wife? What does that tell us about why, all through the Bible, God uses the imagery of a husband and wife as an example of the kind of closeness He seeks with His people?
- 2 Although the story of the Tower of Babel tells us that human ethnic and linguistic diversity were not part of God’s original plan for humanity, how can we transcend such natural divisions today? How can the church still experience unity and harmony even if it is made up of people of many nations and languages?
- 3 What are some of the parallels you found between the calling of ancient Israel and our calling as Seventh-day Adventists? More important, what lessons can we learn from them that should help us to be faithful to our divine calling in Christ?

**Summary:** God’s original plan at Creation intended for humanity to live harmoniously and in unity as one family. The disobedience of our first parents caused an interruption in God’s plan. Yet, God called Abraham to establish a people through whom He can keep alive the promise of restoration that is found only in Christ.

## No More Sabbath Classes

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Seventh-day Adventist students who wish to become nurses no longer face a Sabbath conflict with the opening of the church's first nursing school in Bangladesh.

The three-story facility that houses the Bangladesh Adventist Nursing Institute was funded in part by a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering and stands on the campus of the Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College in Gowalbathan Kaliakoir, a town located a two-hour drive from the country's capital, Dhaka.

"This place will send hundreds of missionaries all over this vast and mighty country, and it will be a blessing from heaven," Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson said at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the nursing school in late 2016. "May God bless this nursing college."

The school, which has room for 100 students, opened for classes in 2017.

The new building—with 10 classrooms, four laboratories, a conference room, and other facilities—received US\$150,000 of its \$400,000 price tag from a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering given by church members worldwide in third quarter 2015, said Myrun Ju Lee, president of the Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College. Another \$100,000 came from the Adventist Church's Southern Asia-Pacific Division, whose territory of 14 countries includes Bangladesh, and the rest came from individual donors in South Korea.

Saw Samuel, president of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, described the establishment of the nursing school as a remarkable accomplishment that would not have been possible without the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

"This is a milestone," Samuel said. "This is the first Adventist health training institute in Bangladesh."

The school also offers local Adventist students the opportunity to study nursing in their own country.

"It is really important for our school here in Bangladesh to be able to have a school of nursing because there is no place where an Adventist young person can go to school to take nursing without having to go to school on Sabbath," said Kevin Costello, associate executive secretary at the division. "Now we will finally have a facility that will be open and available for them so they can get a nursing degree and honor God on the Sabbath as well."

Thank you for your mission offerings that helped make it possible to open the Bangladesh Adventist Nursing Institute.



*Adventist Church president TED N. C. WILSON, second from left, visiting the Bangladesh Adventist Nursing Institute, background*



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Galatians 3:29*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Express God's desire to restore the unity of His creation after sin disrupted the harmony that existed in the Garden of Eden.

**Feel:** Long for the day when relationships will be healed and God's plan of restoration is complete.

**Do:** Respond to God's call to be a representative of His love and reconciliation.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Sin and Unity**

**A** What evidence of God's desire for unity is apparent in the Creation story?

**B** Why can sin be described as the root cause of disunity?

**C** What is the significance of Abraham in God's plan to restore unity?

**II. Feel: Longing for Harmony**

**A** How has sin impacted your relationships?

**B** How is our longing for harmonious relationships met by God's plan of restoration?

**III. Do: Becoming an Ambassador**

**A** Why is it important to understand that love was the basis of God's choice for the descendants of Abraham to represent Him on earth?

**B** What are the practical consequences of being chosen by God?

**C** How can you be a faithful representative of God and His plan of reconciliation?

► **Summary:** The entrance of sin into the world disrupted the unity and harmony that God intended for humanity. However, God expressed His love for humanity by planning a way to restore the unity that had been lost. While the ultimate restoration would come through the work of Christ, God also chose humans to be representatives of His love and grace.

## *Learning Cycle*

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### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 John 4:16*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God’s plan for humanity is one of unity and harmony. While waiting for the final restoration of unity made possible through Christ, God’s people are called to be representatives of His love and grace.

**Just for Teachers:** The opening discussion is based on a true story. It invites the consideration of the impact of one action. As you discuss the story with your class, emphasize the impact of this action on both relationships and emotions.

**Opening Discussion:** A bride had spent months planning the perfect wedding. She had painstakingly chosen everything to provide the atmosphere and impression she intended. On the day of the wedding, the sun was shining and the ceremony went like clockwork. Before she knew it, she had said her vows and enjoyed her first married kiss. But then things started to go wrong. One guest punched another over a minor dispute. Several people tried to calm things down, but others joined the fight. The festive mood was replaced by increasing anger and violence. When the police arrived, they found the wedding in chaos. Sixteen people were arrested, including the groom, who spent his wedding night in jail. The perfect plan was ruined by one thoughtless action.

**Discussion Questions:** What was the impact of one act upon the relationships of those involved in the wedding? How might things have been different if some guests had tried to be peacemakers? Think about something that you have planned carefully, only to have your plans ruined by the actions of another person. How did you feel? What impact was there on your relationship with that person after the incident? How do you think God felt when His perfect plan for humanity was destroyed by the actions of Adam and Eve?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** God’s nature and character are foundational to any understanding of unity. As you review the following sections, look for clues that reveal how God’s nature and character impacted (1) His original plan, (2) His treatment of the guilty pair, and (3) His plan to restore what was lost as a result of sin.

## Bible Commentary

### I. Foundations of Love and Unity *(Review 1 John 4:7, 8, 16 with your class.)*

The book of Genesis starts with the God who creates and brings order out of chaos. This God, although existing in three Persons, is One and demonstrates perfect unity in His very nature. God also is the embodiment of love. Therefore, we can anticipate that both love and unity will exist where God's rule is acknowledged and experienced.

We can find the fingerprints of God's love and unity throughout the biblical account of Creation, from the elimination of chaos to the declaration that everything created was "very good." God's fingerprints of love and unity continue through the creation of humans in God's image and in the setting apart of the Sabbath day. Over six days God formed and filled the various parts of the heavens and the earth, as He prepared a home for humankind. Then He lovingly created Adam and Eve and breathed life into them. He created humans specifically to be in relationship with Him, for God desired to share the love that already existed between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "He created us not only so that we could love Him, but so that He could love us, too. His love led Him to share, in Creation, one of the greatest gifts that He can confer—existence." —*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, second edition, (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 83. God's creation of humans in His image was not only a loving act of a Creator who desired a relationship with His creation, but also a call to humans to reflect His character and to declare His praises.

Consequently, we find that harmony was present from the time God spoke His creation into existence until sin entered the world.

**Consider This:** How are love and unity related? What other aspects of God's character are important in achieving harmony and unity?

### II. Disruption of Harmony *(Review Genesis 3:16–19 with your class.)*

One deliberate act of disobedience by the parents of the human race had disastrous consequences. Sin invaded this world and disrupted the harmony God had designed. Adam and Eve's relationship with God and each other would never be the same. They had talked with God face-to-face before sin, but now they hid, plagued by guilt and fear (*Gen. 3:8*). Blame destroyed their harmonious relationship with each other, as they tried selfishly to maintain their own innocence. Envy, anger, and resentment would follow.

God warned in Genesis 3:16 that the equality Adam and Eve had shared would now be at risk. Before sin, the two had ruled together, as both had been given the same mandate (*Gen. 1:26–28*). After sin, God cautioned that the harmony would change, as one would attempt to rule the other.

**Consider This:** Make a list of the consequences of sin and consider how each consequence impacts human relationships. We commonly consider the impact of sin on our relationship with God and other humans, but rarely do we think about its effect on our relationship with the rest of God’s creation. How has sin impacted the human relationship with the rest of creation?

### III. Restoring What Was Lost (*Review Deuteronomy 7:6–11 with your class.*)

The plan of salvation demonstrates God’s desire to restore the unity that has been lost through sin. As part of this plan, God chose Abraham to be the father of a people who would represent His character to the surrounding nations, and through his descendants, God promised a blessing to all the nations of the earth (*Gen. 12:3*). This promised blessing pointed forward to Jesus, the “son of Abraham” (*Matt. 1:1*), whose death and resurrection would provide reconciliation between God and humankind.

Abraham demonstrated his faith and trust in the promises of God. His actions exemplify what God requires of us. Yet, it is not for these reasons that Abraham’s descendants are called to represent God. God had chosen Abraham before he demonstrated his faith, and before he obediently prepared to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham and his descendants were chosen because God is a God of love who is faithful to His promises. This truth is particularly significant, for it implies that the foundation of the relationship between God and His people is the character of God, and not who they are or what they have done.

**Consider This:** God made four specific promises to Abraham: land, a multitude of descendants, a great name, and being a blessing to all nations. How do each of the promises relate to God’s plan to restore unity among His creation? Why is it important to understand that the relationship between humans and God is founded in God’s character?

## ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The application questions invite the class to consider what representing God looks like in practice, and how this faithful representation might impact the mission of the church.

**Application Questions:**

- ❶ What does it mean to be created in the image of God? How should this impact your actions?
- ❷ God called the church to represent His character. How well is the church representing God’s love and unity to the world today? How might it do better in this regard?
- ❸ In what ways can you personally be a better witness to God’s love and His desire for harmony?
- ❹ What does the story of the Tower of Babel reveal about the forms of unity that are acceptable to God?
- ❺ Discuss the following statement written by Ellen G. White in February 1906: “The most convincing argument we can give to the world of Christ’s mission is to be found in perfect unity. . . . In proportion to our unity with Christ will be our power to save souls.”—*Our High Calling*, p. 170.

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Just as God called Abraham and his descendants to represent His name and character, so God called the church to be His representatives on earth. The activities suggested below call students to embrace their calling to be God’s representatives of love and harmony in their church and neighborhoods.

**Group Activities:**

- ❶ Spend time in prayer asking God to help your class members determine the best ways they can represent God in their neighborhoods.
- ❷ Choose a street in your neighborhood and plan a service evangelism project where members of your Sabbath School class demonstrate God’s love by doing odd jobs that the residents need doing.

**Personal Activities:**

- ❶ Use a theology textbook to explore the different understandings of the image of God that theologians have discussed. Then create a poster that depicts the variety of implications for your life.
- ❷ Consider each of your relationships. Choose one relationship that you would like to improve. Pray about this relationship. Then write a list of things you can do in this relationship to be a better witness of God’s love. Identify one of these actions as a first step to undertake in your relationship during the coming week.