

# God's Plan for a Better Life



## SABBATH—JULY 6

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Exodus 3:7; Exodus 20:1–17; Exodus 23:9; Deuteronomy 14:22–29; Leviticus 25:8–23.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘Do not hurt someone who has hurt you. Do not keep on hating the sons of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord’ ” (Leviticus 19:18, NLV).

**GOD** always has people on this earth who love and obey Him. These people walk with God in a special way. The Bible shows us who some of these people are. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are examples. God connected with these men in Bible times and blessed them. In their stories, we see how God deeply wants to rebuild His broken friendship with humans. But God wants to connect with more people than the ones we read about in the Bible. God wants to join with all humans. It is part of God's big plan to rebuild His broken connections with all humans. What else is part of God's big plan to save us? God wants His people to bless other people. God tells Abraham the same thing (read Genesis 12:2, 3).

God chose Israel to bless everyone on earth. Jesus, the Savior, was born in Israel. God gave the people of Israel special laws, religious holidays, and practices. These ways of life helped Israel stay loyal to God. Then God blessed them, and they blessed other people. This same rule is true today. When God blesses us, we can bless other people too.



**God wants His people to bless other people.**

## THE GOD WHO HEARS OUR CRIES (Exodus 3:7)

“The LORD said, ‘I have seen how my people are suffering in Egypt. I have heard them cry out because of their slave drivers [masters]. I am concerned [care; know] about their suffering’ ” (Exodus 3:7, NIV).

400 years is a long time to wait! It is even worse when you are a slave. God promised to save His people from slavery in Egypt. Year after year passed. But nothing happened. The Egyptians forced God’s people to build. The Egyptians also used God’s people to make them rich. For a long time, God did nothing to free His people.

Then something wonderful happened. God showed Himself in a burning bush to Moses. Moses worked as a shepherd at the time. Before then, Moses ran away from Egypt. Now God gave Moses a job to do. God told Moses to go back to Egypt. God wanted Moses to give His people a message. God heard their cries. He saw their troubles. He cared about them. Now God was going to show them how much He cared. God was going to do something to change their lives in a big way.

**Exodus 3:16, 17 is about God’s plan to save His people. What does God tell Moses to say to the leaders of Israel? Why do you think God gave His people this special message?**



God showed Himself in a burning bush to Moses.

God tells His people about the Promised Land. God will lead His people out of Egypt to live there. He also tells His people that they will not be poor when they leave Egypt. For hundreds of years, God’s people made the Egyptians rich. The Egyptians gave the Israelites nothing for their hard work. God tells Moses that the Egyptians will give gifts to the Israelites when they leave Egypt. God tells Moses, “ ‘And I will cause the Egyptian people to think well of the people of Israel. So when you leave, they will give gifts to your people’ ” (Exodus 3:21, ICB).

God’s people were slaves for many long years. Now God will change that. He tells Moses about His special plan for His people. God wants His people to live in a different way than they lived in Egypt. God will help them start this new way of life. It will be an example for all the people around them to follow. Then other people will start to follow Israel’s way of life too. God will bless Israel as they live this new way of life. And Israel will bless the people around them.

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (Exodus 20:1–17)

**Read the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1–17. Now read what Jesus says about the Ten Commandments in Matthew 22:37–40. How do Jesus’ words help you understand the Ten Commandments better?**

Let us look at Exodus 20:1–17. Do you see that before Moses gives God’s people the law, he gives them something else? What is it? He gives them a warning. He warns them not to forget that God freed them from Egypt. Then Moses gives Israel the Ten Rules for their new way of life. These laws show us that humans should love God and each other. It is easy to see why many leaders used the Ten Commandments to help them make the laws of their land.

Most of the Ten Commandments are short, yes. But they have the power to change lives. That is one reason the Ten Commandments are known as the law of life. Each commandment includes more laws than we see written there. Here is an example. The 6th commandment says, “ ‘Do not kill other people’ ” (Exodus 20:13, NLV). This commandment includes “all actions and behaviors that are not fair and end people’s lives early. . . . The 6th commandment also includes not caring about the poor or suffering people. This bad behavior is selfish.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Old Testament fathers and leaders] and Prophets [special messengers]*, page 308, adapted. Now let us look at the commandment against stealing (read Exodus 20:15). This commandment also is against “slavery and fighting wars to steal land and people.” The 8th commandment also orders us “to give people fair pay for the work they do.” “We must not cheat people. We must give them the money we owe them.” The 8th commandment also warns us “not to make our lives better by cheating people who are poor, weak, or suffering.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 309, adapted.

It is easy to tell ourselves we are not bad people. You have not killed anyone or stolen anything, right? So, you may think you are doing OK. But Jesus made it clear that keeping the commandments means more than our not doing wrong things. Our thoughts can break God’s law. So can our **not** doing something we know we should do (read Matthew 5:21–30). Now make a picture in your head of a community that never broke God’s law! What does that look the same as? It looks the same as a group of people full of love for God. Their love for God will cause them to love each other.



**Our thoughts can break God’s law.**

## SLAVES, WIDOWS, ORPHANS, AND STRANGERS (Exodus 23:9)

**Read Exodus 23:9. What is God’s message to Israel in this verse?**

God freed His people from slavery. The Israelites understood how it felt to live as slaves. The Egyptians used the Israelites and hurt them. The Egyptians made God’s people feel that their lives were not important. So, God worried about His people. He wanted them to remember where they came from. God wanted His people to remember how it felt to be told by the Egyptians that they were not important. God wanted His people to remember what He did to save them. So, God gave His people a special religious feast to celebrate. This feast gave God’s people a special time to talk about what God did for them. “ ‘With his great [strong] power, the Lord brought us out of Egypt. We were slaves in that place’ ’ ” (Exodus 13:14, ICB).



**God made laws that allowed the poor to collect leftover crops from other people’s fields.**

**Read Exodus 22:21–23. Why was it important for God’s people to remember what happened in Egypt? How did being slaves in Egypt help them understand the way they should care for the poor in their new land?**

Shortly after God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He gave Moses more rules. These rules showed God’s people how they should follow the Ten Commandments in their lives. God gave Moses three chapters full of laws. These laws talk about slaves. God did not want His people to behave the same as the Egyptians. God wanted His people to be kind to their slaves. God also gave Moses laws about how to punish crimes. There also were laws about land, everyday life, and rules for judges and courts (read Exodus 21–23).

There were laws about how God’s people should behave in their new land. Also, there were laws about strangers and people who were poor and weak. God’s people must not use or hurt poor and weak people. God made laws that allowed the poor to collect leftover crops from other people’s fields. The laws helped the poor to have hope. These laws were not part of the laws of most lands. Today, we must remember these important rules about being fair and kind to strangers, the poor, and needy in our lands.

**How can you care more about people who suffer?**

## GIFTS OF MONEY WE GIVE TO GOD (Deuteronomy 14:22–29)

Many Christians pay tithe. Tithe is 10% of all the money we get. Malachi 3:10 talks about why we should pay tithe. So, Christians give to the church 10% of all the money they get. The church uses this money to share the Good News about Jesus everywhere on earth. Most churches have strict rules about how they may use the tithe. The church uses tithe to support pastors and evangelists. Evangelists are people who go from place to place to share the Good News about Jesus.

**Read Deuteronomy 14:22–29. What do these verses say is the reason we pay tithe?**

We often think that we pay tithe when we give 10% of all the money we get. But an Israelite who lived in Old Testament times gave to God almost 1/4 of all the money he got for the year. That was a lot more than 1/10 or 10%! The extra money supported the religious leaders and God's house. It also was used to help the poor.

Some Bible experts think that this extra money was another tithe. So, the Israelites paid two tithes. One tithe to support the holy leaders, or priests and God's house of worship. And the people gave a second tithe of food gifts. This second tithe was used for a big feast at God's house. God's people invited the strangers, orphans, and widows in the land to this feast. God wanted His people to remember to bless other people who were too poor to afford food, clothes, and their own homes.

In the first and second year, Israelites brought 10% of their crops to God's house. But every third year, the Israelites remembered the members of their own community in a special way. They celebrated the crops God gave them. And they made sure to take care of the poor and needy in their own town. "Every third [3rd] year is the Year of Tithes. In that year, you must give one-tenth [1/10] of your harvest [crops] to the Levites, to the foreigners living in your country, and to the widows and orphans. Then they will have plenty to eat in every city" (Deuteronomy 26:12, ERV).

**What is the Lord saying to His people in Deuteronomy 26:1–11? How can it help change the way we feel about helping people in need?**



**The second tithe was used for a big feast at God's house. God's people invited the strangers, orphans, and widows to this feast.**



## THE YEAR OF FREEDOM (Leviticus 25:8–23)

At last, God's people entered the Promised Land. God worked with His servant Joshua to help His people divide up the land among Israel's different family groups. God knows what will happen. As time passes, some of His people will sell their land to earn extra money. Maybe they will get sick. Or maybe family troubles will cause them to sell their land. Then the land will no longer belong to the family who owns it.

So, God makes a wise plan. He says that land cannot be sold forever. Land can be sold only until the Year of Jubilee. That was a special time when the land was given back to its owners. God also makes another rule. This rule allows a family member or the person who sold the land to buy back the land at any time. Again, God asks His people to remember their love for Him. That love should change the way they act. God tells His people, " 'The land really belongs to me. So you can't [cannot] sell it forever. You are only foreigners [strangers] and travelers living for a time on my land' " (Leviticus 25:23, ICB).



God's laws show us God's love for the poor.

**Read Leviticus 25:8–23. Pay special attention to the words: " 'Don't [do not] cheat one another [each other]' " (Leviticus 25:14, ERV) and " 'Do not do wrong to one another [each other]' " (Leviticus 25:17, NLV). How different do you think our lives will be if we obey the rules in these verses?**

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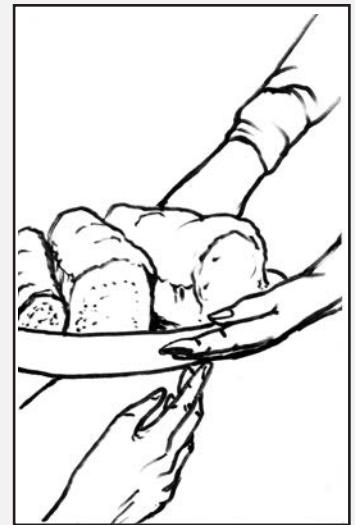
"God made rules to help His people to remember they are all equal. No person is better than another person. God gave crops of fruits and vegetables to His people during the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee. These crops were gifts. God gave these gifts to His people to help them fix problems in the community. These problems happened when leaders wasted money or did not govern the land wisely."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Old Testament fathers and leaders] and Prophets [special messengers]*, page 534, adapted.

How long did God's people follow these rules? (Read 2 Chronicles 36:21.) Bible experts are not sure. Even so, these rules show us how life can be if we fully obey God's laws. God's laws show us God's love for the poor. They also show us that God wants us to be fair to other people.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Ellen G. white, “The Law Given to Israel,” pages 303–314; “God’s Care for the Poor,” pages 530–536, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“What is so special about the laws that God gave to Moses? First, and most important, the laws help us understand that we owe God everything. Next, we see God’s love for the poor. God promised to bless His people. But He never says there will be no poor people in Israel. God announced that the poor shall always be in the land. So, there always will be poor people among us. We must show the poor God’s love. We must be kind to them and help them. In Bible times, people got sick. They lost their land. Bad things happened to them in life. The same things happen to God’s people today. But as long as Israel obeyed God’s laws, then no one needed to beg for food or money. Everyone had enough food to eat.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Old Testament fathers and leaders] and Prophets [special messengers]*, pages 530, 531, adapted.

“God’s rules are a blessing. They bless both the rich and the poor. They help us to not be greedy and selfish. God’s laws also help us to not be proud. They encourage us to give and take care of other people. God’s laws help the rich and the poor to trust each other. His laws help both groups of people to believe the best about each other too. What else do God’s laws do? They help us to have peace in our communities. They help governments to be strong. We are all connected to each other on this earth. When we lift up other people and help them, God blesses us too.”—Pages 534, 535, adapted.



“We must show the poor God’s love.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Think about the plan that God gave to Moses. This plan was about the new way of life for Israel. Which law in God’s plan do you like best? Why?
- 2 God gave Israel laws that talk about orphans, widows, strangers, and the poor. Why do you think God cared so much about these special groups of people?
- 3 How should we think and feel about God’s laws today? How do we know which laws we should continue to follow? What is the most important thing we can learn from God’s laws? How can they help us to live our lives today?