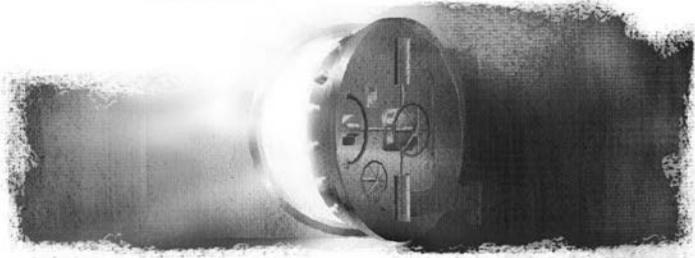


Laying Up Treasure *in* Heaven



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 6:5–14, Heb. 11:8–13, 2 Cor. 4:18, Gen. 13:10–12, Gen. 32:22–31, Heb. 11:24–29.*

Memory Text: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36, 37, NKJV).

Jesus gave us the world's best investment strategy when He said: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19, 20, NKJV). Jesus concludes His investment strategy by saying, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21, NKJV). In other words: *show Me what you spend your money on, and I will show you where your heart is, because wherever you put your money, your heart is sure to follow, if it's not there already.*

Do you want a heart for the kingdom of God? If so, then put your money where it will reap eternal rewards. Put your time and your money and prayer into God's work. If you do, you will soon become even more interested in that work, and your heart will follow, as well. This week we will review texts and illustrations that show us how to store up treasures in heaven and, ultimately, reap an eternal reward.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 11.

Noah Found Grace

It is noteworthy to consider that those who are seeking heavenly treasure are frequently called by God to make major life alterations here on earth. Be prepared to face the same thing, if need be.

Read Genesis 6:5–14. **What radical changes came into Noah’s life as a result of obeying God? What principles can we find here for ourselves in a world that needs to be warned about impending doom?**

Noah could have spent his time and resources building a home for himself, but he chose to make a drastic change in his life and to spend 120 years of that life in following the call of God to build the ark.

Many skeptics today dismiss the story of the Flood as a myth, often based on scientific speculations about the known laws of nature. This is nothing new. “The world before the Flood reasoned that for centuries the laws of nature had been fixed. The recurring seasons had come in their order. Heretofore rain had never fallen; the earth had been watered by a mist or dew. The rivers had never yet passed their boundaries, but had borne their waters safely to the sea. Fixed decrees had kept the waters from overflowing their banks.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 96. Before the Flood, people argued that a flood could never come based on a faulty understanding of reality; after the Flood, based on a faulty understanding of reality, they argue that it never came to begin with. As the Bible says: “There is nothing new under the sun” (*Eccles. 1:9, NKJV*).

Meanwhile, the Bible also says that people will be skeptical of end-time events, as they were of the Flood (*see 2 Pet. 3:3–7*). How can we, then, prepare for the coming destruction? There is a conscious decision called “delayed gratification.” This basically means that we should patiently do the work God has called us to do in the hope of a more glorious future reward. We don’t know when Christ will return. In one sense, it doesn’t matter. What matters instead is that, like Noah, we do what God asks of us in the meantime, even if, as with Noah, it means some radical life changes.

How ready would you be to make a major change in your life for God if, like Noah, you were called to do just that? (Hint: See Luke 16:10.)

Abram, the Father of the Faithful

God called Abram to leave his homeland and his kinfolk and go to a land that He would show him. Thus began the bloodline of the Messiah. Though details aren't given, Abram had to leave the land of his birth and early years. Surely, it wasn't an easy decision, and no doubt he gave up some earthly pleasure and conveniences to do it.

Read Genesis 12:1–3. How were “all the families of the earth . . . blessed” as a result of this promise and its acceptance?

This was a major life-changing event for Abram and his family. “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*). “Abraham’s unquestioning obedience is one of the most striking evidences of faith to be found in all the Bible.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 126.

Most of us would not be eager to leave our homeland and our friends and family members. But Abram did so. Abram was satisfied to be where God wanted him to be. As strange as this may seem, Abram, Isaac, and Jacob never received that land in their lifetimes. Yet, they remained faithful to God anyway.

Read Hebrews 11:8–13. What is the relevant message to us here?

Abram was known as a prince by those living around him. He was known to be generous, brave, hospitable, and a servant of the Most High God. His witness for God was exemplary. By the grace of God, we are heirs with Abraham. “Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (*Gal. 3:6, 7, NKJV*). “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:29, NKJV*).

With Abraham, as with Noah, we see someone making a major life-changing decision as a result of obeying God.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:18. How should the message of this verse impact the kind of spiritual decisions that we make? How did both Moses and Abraham follow that same principle?

Lot's Bad Decisions

When Abram left his homeland in response to God's call, his nephew Lot chose to go with him on his pilgrimage. Genesis 13 records that God blessed Abram to the point that he "was very rich in cattle [the primary measure of wealth in that culture], in silver, and in gold" (*Gen. 13:2*). Lot also "had flocks, and herds, and tents" (*Gen. 13:5*). They both became so wealthy with their extensive livestock herds that they could not dwell close together. In order to avoid strife between their herdsmen, Abram offered Lot the choice of where he would like to live. Of course, Lot should have deferred to Abram, his senior, and because he owed his own prosperity to his connection to him. However, he showed no gratitude to his benefactor and selfishly wanted what he considered the best land available.

Read Genesis 13:10–12. What rational factors could have led Lot to make the decision that he did?

However easily Lot could have justified his decision to move to the city, things didn't turn out so great for him there, and when Abram heard about what happened to him, he didn't say, "Well, too bad, Lot. You reap what you sow." Instead, he came to his rescue (*see Genesis 14*).

Sometimes in our quest for more stuff, we don't learn our lessons well. Lot moved right back into Sodom! But in His great mercy, God sent messengers of warning to Lot and his family, letting them know of the pending destruction of these cities.

Read Genesis 18:20–33. What did God tell Abraham was the reason for His visit to earth? What was Abraham's response to the news that God was planning to destroy these wicked cities?

Because of Abraham's concern for Lot and his family, he bargained with God to spare the cities if righteous people could be found in them. He started with 50 and went down to 10. In harmony with His character of love, God never stopped granting mercy until Abraham stopped asking! God and the two angels personally delivered Lot, his wife, and their two daughters. But his wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Lot entered Sodom a wealthy man and came out with almost nothing. How careful we need to be about the kind of decisions that we make, especially thinking only of short-term gains in contrast to the big picture (*see Mark 8:36, 37*).

From Deceiver to Prince

As a young man who loved and feared God, Jacob nevertheless stooped to conspire with his mother, Rebekah, to deceive his father and gain his blessing. As a consequence, he started his adult life on the wrong path, having to flee or, perhaps, face an early death. Rebekah told Jacob to “flee thou to Laban . . . ; and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother’s fury turn away; . . . then I will send, and fetch thee” (*Gen. 27:43–45*). Jacob was actually gone for 20 years, and he never saw his mother’s face again.

Read Genesis 32:22–31. What happened here to Jacob, and what spiritual lessons can we take from this story about God’s grace, even when we make wrong decisions?

“Through humiliation, repentance, and self-surrender, this sinful, erring mortal prevailed with the Majesty of heaven. He had fastened his trembling grasp upon the promises of God, and the heart of Infinite Love could not turn away the sinner’s plea. The error that had led to Jacob’s sin in obtaining the birthright by fraud was now clearly set before him. He had not trusted God’s promises, but had sought by his own efforts to bring about that which God would have accomplished in His own time and way. . . . Jacob had received the blessing for which his soul had longed. His sin as a supplanter and deceiver had been pardoned.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 197, 198.

Read Genesis 49:29–33. Though Jacob no longer had any holdings in Canaan, what instructions did he give his sons regarding his burial? Who else is buried in that cave? Why do you think Jacob made this request?

The Bible informs us that all three of the patriarchs and their wives are buried in the same cave. Jacob’s trust in God was strong, and he considered himself a stranger and pilgrim on the earth (*see Heb. 11:13*). Despite mistakes, he left home with nothing but came back to Canaan a wealthy man.

Despite our mistakes, God can still bless us. How much better, however, to avoid the mistakes to begin with! What choices are you now facing, and how can you avoid making the wrong ones?

Moses in Egypt

The character of Moses dominated the early years of sacred history. He was kept alive in the providence of God, who worked through an enterprising mother and a caring sister. When Pharaoh's daughter found baby Moses in the ark of bulrushes, she asked his Hebrew mother to care for him and paid her to do so. What a blessed challenge for a young mother who was an exile and slave! Jochebed had only 12 years to teach her child to pray, to trust and honor God, and shape his character for a life of service. For years, Moses was trained in the royal courts of Egypt. " 'And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds' " (*Acts 7:22, NKJV*). As Moses matured as a man, he made a conscious decision that changed his life and the course of history.

Read Hebrews 11:24–29. Think about what Moses left behind and what he had to face instead. Try to look at it from his position, before he made the choice. What was he leaving, and what was he choosing to accept by leaving?

Egypt was one of the greatest powers in the ancient world at the time, if not the greatest. The Nile River created such fertile land that Egypt, flush with crops, was a wealthy and powerful nation, and Moses himself would have been at the top of this kingdom. It's hard to imagine how tempting the lure of the world, the world of Egypt and all its treasures, must have been to him in his early years. Surely, he must have found the adoration, the pleasures, and the riches tempting. No doubt he probably very easily could have justified staying rather than throwing in his lot with a bunch of despised slaves.

And yet, what? As Scripture says, he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (*Heb. 11:25, NKJV*). And talk about afflictions: a major part of the book of Exodus deals with the struggles and trials of Moses, who, even after all he went through, was still not able to cross over to the Promised Land (see *Num. 20:12*). Yet, in the end, we all know that Moses made the right choice, even if at times he must have wondered himself if he really had.

From a worldly perspective, Moses should have stayed in Egypt. However, as Christians, we have been given a view of reality that takes us way beyond this world. When we are tempted by the world, how can we keep the big picture always before us? Why is it so important that we do so?

Further Thought: God honored His part of the covenant by blessing Abraham. And Abraham honored God by not storing up treasures on this earth. “The heritage that God has promised to His people is not in this world. Abraham had no possession in the earth, ‘no, not so much as to set his foot on.’ Acts 7:5. He possessed great substance, and he used it to the glory of God and the good of his fellow men; but he did not look upon this world as his home. The Lord had called him to leave his idolatrous countrymen, with the promise of the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession; yet neither he nor his son nor his son’s son received it. When Abraham desired a burial place for his dead, he had to buy it of the Canaanites. His sole possession in the Land of Promise was that rock-hewn tomb in the cave of Machpelah.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 169.

As we live, we are sometimes tempted to go toward wealth and leisure. It takes strong faith to practice delayed gratification. “The magnificent palace of Pharaoh and the monarch’s throne were held out as an inducement to Moses; but he knew that the sinful pleasures that make men forget God were in its lordly courts. He looked beyond the gorgeous palace, beyond a monarch’s crown, to the high honors that will be bestowed on the saints of the Most High in a kingdom untainted by sin. He saw by faith an imperishable crown that the King of heaven would place on the brow of the overcomer. This faith led him to turn away from the lordly ones of earth and join the humble, poor, despised nation that had chosen to obey God rather than to serve sin.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 246.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What will happen to our possessions when Jesus comes? (See 2 Pet. 3:10.) In fact, what can happen to them even before Jesus comes? (See Matt. 6:20.) Why, then, is it always important to keep things in the proper perspective?
- 2 Jesus warned about “the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19). What is He talking about? How can riches deceive us?
- 3 In class, talk about the ways Moses might have justified staying in Egypt instead of leaving everything behind in order to flee with a bunch of slaves to a barren desert? What ultimately must have caused him to decide as he did?

Miracle of a Mission School

By CHIFUNDO KANJO

Two very different kinds of mission schools shaped John Phiri's life.

As a youth, John was sent from home in Malawi to study the family's non-Christian religion on the Indian Ocean island of Zanzibar. John spent three years immersed in the religion's main book and learning how to establish houses of worship in unentered areas of Africa.

Finishing his education in Zanzibar, the young man was sent back to Malawi to lead two houses of worship. He also was tasked with closely monitoring local Christians and reporting his findings back to Zanzibar. To better understand Christianity, he was instructed to read a King James Bible.

Over the next few years, John joined three different Christian churches, rising to a senior position in one of them, as he collected information for Zanzibar. All the while, he led houses of worship in two Malawian towns.

John's heart was touched as he read the Bible. He found it more understandable than his religion's book. He longed to know more about Jesus.

Still a youth, he enrolled in the Seventh-day Adventist school at Luwazi Mission. For him, it was a new kind of mission school, very different from the school in Zanzibar. He was particularly interested in the school's Pathfinder club, and he joined it, participating in all the programs.

John fell in love with Jesus during a week of prayer at the school, and he gave his heart to Jesus in baptism. He stopped sending information to Zanzibar. John's father was furious when he found out. He angrily accused John's mother of being the cause, and he divorced her.

Years passed, and John felt called by God to put his mission schooling to work. While he had been trained in Zanzibar to open houses of worship in unentered areas for his former religion, he resolved to take his Adventist education and do the same thing for Jesus. He became a Global Mission pioneer, an Adventist who establishes congregations in unentered areas within his or her own culture. John served as a Global Mission pioneer for 10 years, and many people from his family's religion gave their hearts to Jesus.

John went on to graduate with a theology degree from Malawi Adventist



University and today serves as an Adventist pastor. John said the Adventist mission school changed his life. "Do not underestimate the importance of mission schools," he said. "They are a tool for people to know Jesus and accept Him as their personal Savior. Seventh-day Adventist education is very vital in preaching the gospel and making Christ known to all."

Learn more about Global Mission pioneers online at: bit.ly/GMpioneer.

Part I: Overview

Noah is an example of someone who stored treasure in heaven. He walked with God and, by faith, invested his resources in building the ark on dry land. In warning the world to escape destruction from the rain that didn't then exist, Noah saved himself and his family, inheriting the entire earth (*Gen. 6:14–18*). Abraham also, by believing, journeyed, not knowing where he was going, trusting that a multitude would come from his barren wife (*Gen. 11:30, Gen. 17:16*). Later, Abraham took his only son and greatest treasure to be sacrificed (*Gen. 22:9, Heb. 11:17*). Moses, a prince, relinquished the kingdom of Egypt because he understood rightly that suffering for God's cause is more profitable than earthly riches and pleasures (*Heb. 11:24–27*).

But the love of riches can choke out the Word from the hearts of people (*Matt. 13:22*). The example of Lot, going to prosperous Sodom, and of Jacob, using deceit to get the birthright, ended in loss and suffering for both men. By repenting, Lot was saved, and his name was preserved among the righteous (*2 Pet. 2:7*). Later, some of his descendants were grafted into the Messianic lineage (*Gen. 19:30, 37; Ruth 4:10; Matt. 1:5*). Jacob, by supplication and weeping, became Israel, fathering the chosen nation (*Hos. 12:4, 5; Gen. 32:28*). All these men overcame by faith, devoting everything, in the end, to the Lord's cause. Our hearts should be likewise devoted (*Matt. 6:19–21*).

Part II: Commentary

Treasure for God

Jesus advises us to lay up treasure in heaven (*Matt. 6:19, 20*). But how do we do this? One way is investment. When we invest in church and charity, acknowledging these aspects of God's kingdom on earth, we invest in heaven.

A. Investing

“Earthly treasures are blessings when rightly used. Those who have them should realize that they are lent them of God and should cheerfully spend their means to advance His cause.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 141.

1. Where our treasures lie is an indication of the loyalties and priorities of our hearts (affections, commitments, and preferences) (*Matt. 6:21*).

Those who love money will never have enough of it (*Eccles. 5:10*). Paul tells us that this love is the root of all evil (*1 Tim. 6:10*). The way we use our money is a test of faithfulness for eternity (*Luke 16:10, 11*). But if our money is invested only in worldly undertakings, we will love mammon more than God (*Luke 16:13*). God wants our hearts (*Prov. 23:26*), and we can offer them to Him by investing in His work. Therefore, we will make “friends” among those who will receive us in the “everlasting habitations” (*Luke 16:9*), where we will love and serve God, not possessions (*Luke 16:13*).

2. The divine commission to proclaim salvation to all nations (*Matt. 28:18–20*) is all-encompassing. Large investments are required.

In terms of sin, Heaven invested the blood of Jesus in our salvation. Jesus, the Lamb, who was slain before the foundation of the world (*1 Pet. 1:18, 19*), gave us the promise that the Holy Spirit would remain with us always, as assurance of our redemption (*Eph. 1:13, 14*). The blood of martyrs is a most precious investment that was shed for God’s Word (*Rev. 6:9, 10*). The dead in Christ are investors waiting for an inheritance that includes the end of sin and the restoration of all things (*2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:1–7*).

Investing our life and possessions in the spreading of the gospel (*Matt. 28:19*), through faith, is the sure way to lay up treasure in heaven.

B. Examples of Good Investments

1. *Investing Despite Opposition*: Opposition to faith comes from outside us in the form of persecution (*2 Tim. 3:12*) and in the form of attacks from spiritually evil forces (*Eph. 6:11, 12*). But from within us, human nature brings forth lust and sin, which lead to death (*James 1:14, 15*). That’s because the unregenerate heart is not of the Father but of the world (*1 John 2:15, 16*). Bible examples point to situations in which it seemed impossible for God’s promises to be fulfilled because of opposition from within and without. But the faithful remained steadfast in doing what God commanded, and they prevailed.

2. *Noah (Genesis 6)*: Noah and his family felt social pressure to conform to prevailing beliefs because their warnings of coming destruction by a flood of water went contrary to the fact that it had never rained. They were persecuted and mocked by those who had scientific knowledge at the time that contradicted the divine prediction. But faith doesn’t always rely on, nor is it always in line with, science or evidence.

The world around Noah was not wrong regarding the natural signs. They simply did not believe in God’s revelation. The antediluvians laid their treasure (and hearts) in this earth, and it made the difference between life and death.

It is not enough to be right and in line with science and public opinion. It is necessary to *know* and *do* God's will.

Noah and his family also must have suffered great psychological stress caused by the prevalent reaction and awareness of the imminent destruction of the planet. Noah was able to withstand the pressure only by stepping out in faith and obeying wholeheartedly the mission that God gave him.

3. *Abraham (Gen. 12:1–9)*: Abraham faced the unknown, separation from his family, and the dangers of nomadic life in his long sojourn. The “scientific” evidence was against his becoming the father of a great multitude, as the years went by and Sarah remained barren.

Once again, we see an example of fear within and opposing evidence outside warring against God's word. Ultimately, Abraham invested in the mission that God gave him. He laid his treasure in heaven, investing all in the work God gave him, and he became the father of a great multitude through Isaac's miraculous birth.

4. *Moses (Exod. 3:1–4:16)*: Moses was timid but went to speak with the greatest ruler on earth; without an army, Moses went to demand the release of the Hebrew slaves. Without food or water, Moses crossed the desert with more than one million men, women, children, and animals. With a mere staff, Moses performed supernatural miracles that God empowered him to do. Rejecting the throne of the world's superpower, Moses relinquished the greatest earthly fortune anyone could ever wish for and laid up treasure in heaven.

C. Examples of Bad Investments

1. Psychologically, people give priority to the immediate fulfillment of their desires and urgent needs, or to those needs and desires that are before their eyes. In reality, hope deferred discourages (*Prov. 13:12*). Therefore, patience is required to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises according to His perfect timing (*Rom. 8:25*). Human beings tend to seek instant gratification, wanting to hasten the fulfillment of the promises and the attainment of their expectations.

Jacob and Lot were shortsighted at certain points in their lives. As a result, they were forced to endure loss until they yielded all to Christ and accepted divine mercy.

We don't always have an immediate answer to our prayers, and things aren't always the way we would like. The following counsel is fitting at such times: “Walk the narrow plank of faith. Trust all on the promises of the Lord. Trust God in darkness. That is the time to have faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 167.

2. God destined Jacob to become the inheritor of the covenant promises and blessings that were Esau's by right of birth. Instead of trusting to providence to overrule the impediments to his destiny, Jacob agreed to his mother's underhanded scheme to lie and steal the birthright blessing belonging to his brother (*Genesis 27*). Apart from the controlling power of faith, Jacob was a reckless opportunist who hastened to bring about, at any cost, the result he deemed beneficial. After Bethel (*Gen. 28:11–22*), Jacob was touched and transformed by the vision of the Ladder connecting heaven and earth (*John 1:51*). In the encounter at Jabbok (*Gen. 32:24–29*), after much weeping and supplication (*Hos. 12:4, 5*), he was given the name Israel. His name change commemorated his wrestling match with God and its victorious outcome. Jacob's victory represents the experience of the saved.

3. Ambitious Lot sought the promise of gain and of profit. He chose the city along the best trade route, with green plains and a large consumer market. He made his home in the wicked city of Sodom, abandoning the nomadic life of Abraham (*Gen. 13:10–13*). In the end, Lot lost all his material possessions and part of his family. His dreams of prosperity having shattered, he was forced to flee to the mountains with his two daughters because of his short-sighted choice (*Gen. 19:15–30*).

Jesus' appeal is still valid today: trust in Divine Providence and lay up treasure in heaven (*Matt. 6:19–21*). Invest in the preaching of the gospel while there is still time.

“There is now a good opportunity for them to use their means for the benefit of suffering humanity and also for the advancement of the truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 638.

Part III: Life Application

Ask a class member to read aloud the quotations below. Then discuss with your class the questions that follow.

Faith and Patience

“There are many who become restless when they cannot know the definite outcome of affairs. They cannot endure uncertainty, and in their impatience they refuse to wait to see the salvation of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 687.

Pressure from circumstances led Lot and Jacob to seek success without waiting on God's perfect timing.

- 1. What precautions should we take to avoid what happened to Lot and Jacob?**

2. How does patience to wait on God, without anxiously seeking material security, foster faithfulness in tithes and offerings?

3. Do you find yourself growing restless when you can't immediately know the outcome of affairs? Why do you think that patiently enduring life's uncertainties and waiting for God's salvation is so difficult for many of us? How does impatience hinder faith (*Heb. 11:1, 2, 6; Heb. 6:15; Heb. 10:36*)? Why do you think that is so?

Faith and Works

“Those who still cling to their earthly treasure, and will not make a right disposition of that which is lent them of God, will lose their treasure in heaven, lose everlasting life.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 174.

Salvation is through faith (*Eph. 2:8–10*).

1. How does faithfulness in tithes, offerings, and helping those in need promote fellowship with God and reveal trust in His providence?

2. How does faithfulness in tithes and offerings affect our faith?
