

Children of the Promise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 15:1–3, Isa. 25:8, 1 Cor. 2:9, Rev. 22:1–5, 1 Pet. 2:9, Gen. 11:4, Gen. 12:2.*

Memory Text: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (*Matthew 28:20*).

A father and his 10-year-old daughter were spending their holiday at the seashore. One day they went out to enjoy a swim in the ocean, and although they were both good swimmers, some distance out from the shore they became separated. The father, realizing that they were being carried out to sea by the tide, called to his child: ‘Mary, I’m going to shore for help. If you get tired, turn on your back. You can float all day that way. I’ll come back for you.’

“Before long, many searchers and boats were scurrying over the face of the water hunting for one small girl. Hundreds of people on the shore had heard the news and were waiting anxiously. It was four hours before they found her, far from land, but she was calmly floating on her back and not at all frightened. Cheers and tears of joy and relief greeted the rescuers when they came back to land with their precious burden, but the child took it all calmly. She seemed to think it was strange the way they acted. She said, ‘Father said I could float all day on my back and that he would come for me, so I just swam and floated, because I knew he’d come.’”—H. M. S. Richards, “When Jesus Comes Back,” *Voice of Prophecy News*, March 1949, p. 5.

The Week at a Glance: Why did the Lord refer to Himself as Abram’s Shield? How were “all the families of the earth” to be blessed through Abraham? What is the greatest of all the covenant promises?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 1.

Thy Shield

“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (*Gen. 15:1*).

Read Genesis 15:1–3. Think of the context in which this message was given. Why would the first thing the Lord says to Abram be “Fear not”? What would Abram have to fear?

What’s particularly interesting here is that the Lord says to Abram, “I am thy shield.” The use of the personal pronouns shows the personal nature of the relationship. God will relate to him one-on-one, the way He will to all of us.

The designation of God as a “Shield” appears here for the first time in the Bible and is the only time God uses it to reveal Himself, even if other Bible passages use the term to speak *about* God (*Deut. 33:29, Ps. 18:30, Ps. 84:11, Ps. 144:2*).

When God calls Himself someone’s shield, what does that mean? Did it mean something to Abram that it might not mean to us now? Can we claim that promise for ourselves? Does it mean no physical harm will come? In what ways is God a shield? How do you understand that image?

“Christ has not a casual interest in us but an interest stronger than a mother for her child. . . . Our Saviour has purchased us by human suffering and sorrow, by insult, reproach, abuse, mockery, rejection and death. He is watching over you, trembling child of God. He will make you secure under His protection. . . . Our weakness in human nature will not bar our access to the heavenly Father, for He [Christ] died to make intercession for us.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 77.

From all outward appearances, Rolando had been a faithful follower of the Lord. Then, suddenly, he died unexpectedly. What happened to God as his shield? Or must we understand the idea of God as our shield in a different manner? Explain. What does God always promise to shield us from? (See 1 Cor. 10:13.)

The Messianic Promise: Part 1

“In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (*Gen. 28:14*).

“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:29*).

More than once the Lord said to Abraham that in his seed, his offspring, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (*see also Gen. 12:3, Gen. 18:18, Gen. 22:18*). This wonderful covenant promise is repeated because, of all of the promises, this is the most important one, the most enduring one, the one that makes all the others worthwhile. In one sense, this was a promise of the rise of the Jewish nation, through whom the Lord wanted to teach “all the families of the earth” about the true God and His plan of salvation. Yet, the promise reaches complete fulfillment only in Jesus Christ, who came from the seed of Abraham, the One who would at the cross pay for the sins of “all the families of the earth.”

Think about the covenant promise made after the Flood in which the Lord promised not to destroy the world with water again. What ultimate good would this be without the promise of redemption found in Jesus? What ultimate good would any of God’s promises be without the promise of eternal life found in Christ?

How do you understand the notion that in Abraham, through Jesus, “all the families of the earth” would be blessed? What does that mean?

No question, the covenant promise of the world’s Savior is the greatest of all God’s promises. The Redeemer Himself becomes the *means* by which the obligations of the covenant arrangement are met and all of its other promises are realized. All, Jew or Gentile, who enter into union with Him are accounted as Abraham’s true family and inheritors of the promise (*Gal. 3:8, 9, 27–29*)—that is, the promise of eternal life in a sinless environment where evil, pain, and suffering will never again arise. Can you think of a better promise than that?

What is it about the promise of eternal life in a world without sin and suffering that has such an attraction for us? Could it be that we long for it because that’s what we were originally created for and that by longing for it we are longing for something that is basic to our nature?

The Messianic Promise: Part 2

“To enjoy true happiness we must travel into a very far country, and even out of ourselves.”—Thomas Browne.

Look at that above quote, written in the 1600s. Do you agree or disagree? Read it in the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and of Revelation 3:12.

Augustine wrote of the human condition: “This life of ours—if a life so full of such great ills can properly be called a life—bears witness to the fact that, from its very start, the race of mortal men has been a race condemned. Think, first, of the dreadful abyss of ignorance from which all error flows and so engulfs the sons of Adam in a darksome pool that no one can escape without the toll of toils and tears and fears. Then, take our very love for all those things that prove so vain and poisonous and breed so many heartaches, troubles, griefs, and fears; such insane joys in discord, strife, and wars; such fraud and theft and robbery; such perfidy and pride, envy and ambition, homicide and murder, cruelty and savagery, lawlessness and lust; all the shameless passions of the impure—fornication and adultery, incest and unnatural sins, rape and countless other uncleannesses too nasty to be mentioned; the sins against religion—sacrilege and heresy, blasphemy and perjury; the iniquities against our neighbors—calumnies and cheating, lies and false witness, violence to persons and property; the injustices of the courts and the innumerable other miseries and maladies that fill the world, yet escape attention.”—Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1958), p. 519.

Augustine’s quote could apply to most modern cities today; yet, he wrote it more than fifteen hundred years ago. Little about humanity has changed, which is why people want an escape.

Fortunately, however tough our situation now, the future is bright—but only because of what God did for us through the life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ—the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant promise made to Abraham that, in his seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Look at the quote from Augustine. Write something in your own words to describe the sad situation in the world today. At the same time, look up whatever Bible texts you can find that talk about what God has promised us in Jesus Christ (for example, Isa. 25:8, 1 Cor. 2:9, and Rev. 22:2–5). Dwell on those promises. Make them your own. Only then can you truly grasp what the covenant is all about.

A Great and Mighty Nation . . .

Not only did God promise Abraham that in him would all the families of the earth be blessed, but the Lord also said that He would make of him a “great and mighty nation” (*Gen. 18:18*; see also *Gen. 12:2*, *Gen. 46:3*)—quite a promise to a man married to a woman past child-bearing age. Thus, when Abraham was without descendants, much less a son, God promised him both.

Yet, this promise was not completely fulfilled while Abraham was alive; in fact, neither Isaac nor Jacob saw it come to pass. God repeated it to Jacob, with the added information that the promise would be fulfilled in Egypt (*Gen. 46:3*), though Jacob did not see it. Eventually, of course, that promise was fulfilled.

Why did the Lord want to make a special nation out of Abraham’s seed? Did the Lord just want another country of a certain ethnic origin? What purposes was this nation to fulfill? Read Exodus 19:5, 6; Isaiah 60:1–3; and Deuteronomy 4:6–8. On the lines below, write out your answer:

It seems evident from Scripture that God purposed to attract the nations of the world to Himself through the witness of Israel, which would be, under His blessing, a happy, healthy, and holy people. Such a nation would demonstrate the blessing that attends obedience to the will of the Creator. The multitudes of earth would be drawn to worship the true God (*Isa. 56:7*). Thus, the attention of humanity would be drawn toward Israel, their God, and the Messiah who was to appear in their midst, the Savior of the world.

“The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them. Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God were to be dispossessed. But it was God’s purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 290.

Can you see any parallels between what the Lord wanted to do through Israel and what He wants to do through our church? If so, what are those parallels? Read 1 Peter 2:9.

“Make Your Name Great”

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing” (*Gen. 12:2*).

In Genesis 12:2, God promises to make Abram’s name great—that is, to make him famous. Why would the Lord want to do that for any sinner, no matter how obedient and faithful? Who deserves a “great” name? (*See Rom. 4:1–5 and James 2:21–24.*) Did God bestow greatness on Abram for his own personal benefit, or did it represent something more? Explain.

Compare Genesis 11:4 with Genesis 12:2. What is the big difference between the ideas presented in these two texts? In what ways does one represent “salvation by works” and the other “salvation by faith”?

However much the plan of salvation rests only upon the work of Christ in our behalf, we—as recipients of God’s grace—are, nevertheless, still involved. We have a role to play; our free choice comes into prominence. The drama of the ages, the battle between Christ and Satan, is still being played out in and through us. Both humanity and angels are watching what is happening with us in the conflict (*1 Cor. 4:9*). Thus, who we are, what we say, what we do, far from having no importance beyond our own immediate sphere, has implications that can, in a sense, reverberate across the universe. By our words, our actions, even our attitudes, we can help bring glory to the Lord, who has done so much for us, or we can bring shame upon Him and His name. Thus, when the Lord said to Abraham that He would make his name great, He surely was not talking about it in the same way the world talks about someone as having a great name. What makes a name great in the eyes of God is character, faith, obedience, humility, and love for others, traits that might often be respected in the world but are not usually the factors the world would deem as making someone’s name great.

Look at some of the men and women who have “great” names in the world today, be it actors, politicians, artists, the wealthy, or whoever. What is it about these people that has made them famous? Contrast that with the greatness of Abraham. What does that tell us about how perverted the world’s concept of greatness is? How much of that worldly attitude impacts our view of greatness, as well?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Abraham in Canaan,” pp. 132–144, and “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. . . . But he did not hesitate to obey the call. He had no question to ask concerning the land of promise. . . . God has spoken, and His servant must obey; the happiest place on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 126.

When Abram entered Canaan, the Lord appeared to him and made it clear that he was to sojourn in the land that would be given to his descendants (*Gen. 12:7*). God repeated this promise several times (*see Gen. 13:14, 15, 17; Gen. 15:13, 16, 18; Gen. 17:8; Gen. 28:13, 15; Gen. 35:12*). Some four hundred years later, in fulfillment of the promise (*Gen. 15:13, 16*), the Lord announced to Moses that He would bring Israel out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey (*Exod. 3:8, 17; Exod. 6:8*). God repeated the promise to Joshua (*Josh. 1:3*), and in David’s day it was largely, but not completely, fulfilled (*Gen. 15:18–21, 2 Sam. 8:1–14, 1 Kings 4:21, 1 Chron. 19:1–19*).

Now read Hebrews 11:9, 10, 13–16. These verses make it clear that Abraham and the other faithful patriarchs viewed Canaan as a symbol, or a foreshadowing, of the ultimate settled home of God’s redeemed people. In the sin situation, no permanent home is possible. Life is fleeting, like “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (*James 4:14, RSV*). As the spiritual descendants of Abraham, we, too, must realize that “here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (*Heb. 13:14, NIV*). The certainty of the future life with Christ keeps us steady in this present world of change and decay.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What effect should God’s promise of a new earth have on our personal Christian experience? (*Compare Matt. 5:5; 2 Cor. 4:17, 18; Rev. 21:9, 10; and Rev. 22:17.*)
- ② “True greatness was to result from compliance with God’s commands and cooperation with His divine purpose.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 293. What does this statement mean?

Summary: Promises! How precious they are to the believer! Will they be fulfilled? Faith answers yes.

Trusting God or Science

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

The physician showed the 3-D ultrasound images to Dr. Hernando Diaz. “You’re a physician,” he said. “Here is the evidence. End the pregnancy.”

Hernando’s pregnant wife, Erica, wept. The images showed that their baby had Potter’s syndrome, a rare condition associated with kidney failure, abnormal limbs, and an unusual facial appearance, including widely separated eyes.

As a physician, Hernando understood that the physician was right. But as a Christian, he wondered what to do. The baby wouldn’t live if the 32-week pregnancy were ended, but there might be hope if they waited. Should he trust science or God? “God will have the last word,” he said.

Complications beset the pregnancy, and the physician recommended a C-section to save Erica’s life. Hernando and Erica prayed. Their church prayed. Family and hospital staff rebuked Erica for not ending the pregnancy.

Two days before the C-section, a 3-D ultrasound showed that nothing had changed. That night, Erica had a dream. She saw a baby boy playing in a basket and heard a voice telling her husband, “Take your son. He is a gift from God. You shall name him Samuel David. Raise him according to God’s Word.”

Erica and Hernando took the dream as a sign that the baby might survive. They bought baby supplies for the first time. The next day, however, they braced for the worst. The physician said that he would do the C-section, cut the umbilical cord, and expect the baby to die within minutes.

C-sections usually take 20 to 30 minutes. Hernando waited in the waiting room for 30 minutes . . . 40 minutes . . . 50 minutes. His anxiety grew as 60 minutes passed. Suddenly he heard screams. They weren’t his wife’s. They weren’t their baby’s. They were the sound of the physician and nurses screaming in surprise. They had expected a deformed baby but instead found a perfect baby boy.

“It is impossible!” the physician exclaimed. “This is a miracle!”

The parents determined to raise Samuel David according to God’s Word, and today they credit him for leading them and many others to Jesus. While seeking medical treatment for the boy’s subsequent kidney problems, they learned about and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Today, Hernando works as a physician at the Adventist Medical Center on the campus of Colombia Adventist University in Medellin, Colombia. Samuel is a healthy eight-year-old boy. “We decided to trust in God even though almost everyone was against us,” said Hernando, 60. “God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. Many people have come to the feet of Jesus after hearing Samuel’s story.”



This quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

Study Focus: *Matthew 28:20****Part I: Overview***

God's covenants are timeless. Though Noah, Abraham, and Moses, and others have passed away, the fulfillment of God's promises still goes on. His promise of salvation is still extended to us if we choose to open our hearts to Him.

Part II: Commentary

When Yahweh announced that He was Abram's *Shield* (*Gen. 15:1*), this meant that He would be Abram's Protector. The term *shield* pointed to Yahweh's protective guarantee to Abram. In spite of his idea that Eliezer would become the son of his inheritance, a special son would spring from Sarai's womb. This son would produce an *Abrahamic* bloodline, and they would be as myriad as "the stars."

Thy Shield

"After these things the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not fear, Abram; I am your shield, *your reward will increase greatly.*'"—Jay Green, ed., *The Interlinear Hebrew/Greek English Bible*, vol. 1, p. 32; emphasis supplied. (*See Gen. 15:1.*)

"The 'shield' or protection spoken of here does not refer to physical protection in war or physical protection from misfortune. Rather, it refers to protection from the possibility that the covenant promise would not be fulfilled through Abraham and his future seed. . . . If we are Abraham's seed (and all who have the faith of Abraham are Abraham's seed), then we also have the assurance that God will be our shield."—Gerhard M. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, p. 44.

The Messianic Promise: Part 1

Having been denied entrance to the Promised Land, Moses stood on the palatial mountaintop of his odyssey's end and was given a vision of the coming Messiah: "He was permitted to look down the stream of time and behold the first advent of our Saviour. . . . He beheld Christ's humble life in Nazareth, His ministry of love and sympathy and healing, His rejection by a proud, unbelieving nation. . . . He saw Jesus upon Olivet as with weeping He bade farewell to the city of His love. . . .

"He saw that . . . God had not cast off the seed of Abraham; the

glorious purposes which He had undertaken to accomplish through Israel were to be fulfilled. All who through Christ should become the children of faith were to be counted as Abraham's seed."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 475, 476.

The Messianic Promise: Part 2

In Genesis 3:15, the preincarnate Christ predicted the Messianic advent, which was to provide atonement for the human race; to prove to sinless realms that there was no excuse for Adam's failure and to validate the immortal blending of the law and the gospel by means of Calvary.

The Adamic fall produced in humankind a new paradigm of evil. Adam's posterity became diseased with a natural mental proclivity to rebel against divine sovereignty. Hence, since sin cannot be mere wrongdoing, it should be described as a spiritual psychotic condition that rages against divine sovereignty. In Matthew 1:21, the promise was given of a coming Christ who would heal us from the disease of spiritual schizophrenia. Born outside of Christ, the human race is in a condition of spiritual psychopathology. Christ came that we might become healed through a "blood transfusion" on the basis of His death at Calvary.

Thus, Christ became the *Monogenes*, or *only begotten Son* (*John 3:16*), in that Christ entered the cosmos as the only One of His kind, without any competition. In Nazareth, the Second Adam started His humble ministry in a fallen, corrupt world, in contrast to the perfection of Paradise, wherein the original Adam failed. This God-man, who was tempted in all things, successfully evaded the hellhounds of sin. (*See Gen. 3:15; 1 Cor. 10:13; 15:21, 22; and Heb. 4:15, 16.*) Read Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 700.

"Make Your Name Great"

In scorching contrast to those stellar, though presumptuous, empire builders on the plains of Shinar, Abraham avoided self-deification, even though God had promised to make his name great. "If Nimrod is the archetypal secular political leader of the post-Flood world, Abraham is its spiritual leader. Abraham is . . . Yahweh's instrument for the fulfillment of His vision for humanity. . . .

"With Abraham, world history takes a different tack; God establishes a new pattern. Abraham is the wave of the future for human beings and for all nations. Yahweh indicates here His indifference to bloodlines. . . .

"A new line of believers in the one God is begun. Abraham, an Afro-Asiatic who lived in Nimrod's area of influence, is chosen by Yahweh to be His servant for the blessing of his brothers through his seed. . . .

“One man now is to act on behalf of God and humanity. . . . The plan and inclusion in it are based, not on ethnicity, but on covenant relationship.”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, pp. 77–79.

Part III: Life Application

For Reflection: A rabbinic tale of the Red Sea crossing goes like this: just as the sea began to drown the Egyptians, the angels in heaven began to clap and dance and celebrate. Then God’s sorrowful voice intervened, saying, “The work of My hand, My creation, has sunk in the sea!” God’s love is so great that He takes no pleasure in the destruction of even the most wicked.

- 1. God’s love extends to everyone, even the person who breaks His law and His heart. How is this love manifested in the covenant relationship that He seeks to establish with every individual? How does this love continue to manifest itself when one rejects God’s offer? What is Satan’s defense when God exhibits such love?**

- 2. Because they were oppressed by a foreign power, the Jewish people wanted a messiah who would free them. Jesus, however, journeyed into this world to take up a cross, not to occupy a throne. How did His mission fit into God’s covenant offer to us?**

3. God had many plans for Israel, but the people often failed Him. Do you suppose God wants to use us as He meant to use Israel? Explain. What must we do individually and as a church so that we may “hear” His voice and be His vessels?

4. With the coming of the Messiah, the people expected signs and wonders, miracles and mysticism. In what ways are we like that today? How is it possible for us to miss the subtle signs of the Second Coming? As a corporate body, how can the church make positive strides toward being a prepared and waiting people?

5. When you accept God’s salvation, you begin the journey of becoming more and more like Christ with every passing day. What barometer do you use to measure your progress? What do you think God uses to measure your progress? Charles Swindoll describes the struggle of one’s spiritual growth as three steps forward, one step backward. If such is the case, how does one press forward without getting discouraged? In Genesis 15:1, God tells Abram that He is his “exceeding great reward.” In what sense is God and our relationship with Him not just a means to an end but the end in itself?

-
6. God tells Jacob in Genesis 28:14 that his blessing would lead to the entire world being blessed. Can a blessing really be a blessing if it is not somehow shared? Explain.

7. God's original covenant with Abram seemed to suggest that He had Abram's lineal descendants in mind. But later on, it becomes clear that God had in mind diverse groups and individuals united by common faith. Did God change His mind? Discuss.

8. The fact that God chose Abram, an obscure nomad, suggests that what God values in human beings is quite different from what we value about ourselves and others. What might God have seen in Abraham?

UNITED BY MISSION



Angie



Magdalena



Elina

A 17-year-old girl starts a prayer group at public school in Mexico. A 12-year-old girl gives Bible studies to a dentist in Trinidad and Tobago. A 10-year-old girl leads school bullies to baptism in Colombia. What do they have in common? They are united by mission in the Inter-America Division, which will receive this quarter's Thirteen Sabbath Offering.

Read more in the youth and adult Mission magazine (bit.ly/adultmission) and the Children's Mission magazine (bit.ly/childrensmision).

Thank you for supporting Adventist Mission with your prayers and Sabbath School mission offerings.





What is Total Member Involvement?

- ▶ Total Member Involvement (TMI) is a full-scale, world-church evangelistic thrust that involves every member, every church, every administrative entity, every type of public outreach ministry, as well as personal and institutional outreach.
- ▶ It is a calendar-driven, intentional soul-winning plan that discovers the needs of families, friends, and neighbors. Then it shares how God fulfills every need, resulting in church planting and church growth, with a focus on retaining, preaching, sharing, and discipling.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT TMI TIME IN SABBATH SCHOOL

Dedicate the first 15 minutes of each lesson to plan, pray and share:*

- ▶ **TMI IN-REACH:** Plan to visit, pray, care for missing or hurting members, and distribute territory assignments. Pray and discuss ways to minister to the needs of church families, inactive members, youth, women and men, and various ways to get the church family involved.
- ▶ **TMI OUT-REACH:** Pray and discuss ways of reaching your community, city, and world, fulfilling the Gospel Commission by sowing, reaping, and keeping. Involve all ministries in the church as you plan short-term and long-term soul-winning projects. TMI is about intentional acts of kindness. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved: 1. Develop the habit of finding needs in your community. 2. Make plans to address those needs. 3. Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ **TMI UP-REACH:** Lesson Study. Encourage members to engage in individual Bible study—make study of the Bible in Sabbath School participatory. Study for transformation, not information.

TMI	Time	Explanation
Fellowship Outreach World Mission	15 min.*	Pray, plan, organize for action. Care for missing members. Schedule outreach.
Lesson Study	45 min.*	Involve everyone in the study of the lesson. Ask questions. Highlight key texts.
Lunch		Plan lunch for the class after worship. THEN GO OUT AND REACH SOMEONE!

**Adjust times as necessary.*