

## **Christian Education**

# **Sabbath: Experiencing and Living the Character of God**

Lesson #12 for December 19, 2020

Scriptures: Genesis 1&2; Exodus 16:14-29; Isaiah 58:1-14; Matthew 12:1-13; Mark 2:27-28; Luke 13:10-17.

1. **Jodie was the only Seventh-day Adventist in her graduate program, and her choice not to attend some social events on Sabbath made her beliefs very visible.**

**One day one of her friends, Gayle, called her. Gayle's husband was going to be out of town for six weeks, and she asked Jodie if she wanted to spend the next six Friday nights with her, because she knew Jodie did "nothing" on those evenings, anyway.**

**For the next four Friday nights they ate together, played music, shared their Christian experiences, and generally enjoyed each other's company. The fifth weekend, Gayle told Jodie that she had been downtown shopping and looked at her watch. *Oh, good, she thought. Sabbath is very soon.* She suddenly realized that over the four Friday nights she had experienced something new in her Christian experience. She had grown, learned more of her God, and deepened her faith. Sabbath had been an opportunity for education and personal development.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sabbath afternoon, December 12.<sup>†§</sup>**

2. What opportunities might we have to get together with acquaintances or friends and enjoy the Sabbath as Jodie and her friend did?
3. Why do you suppose God gives us two "separate" creation accounts?
4. Clearly, Genesis 1 focuses on God's power and His ability to create out of nothing. Genesis 2 focuses on what happened on the sixth day, with the creation of Adam and then Eve and the immediate events connected with those experiences.
5. But, even those two chapters taken together are nothing but the briefest possible account of what actually happened. Do you look forward to the day when we will see the panorama showing exactly how all those things happened? (See *Great Controversy* page 666 and the following pages.)
6. Have you ever tried to imagine yourself in the shoes of Adam and/or Eve? What were they doing during those first full 24 hours which we call the first Sabbath? What did they do to get to know each other better? What did they do to explore their garden and the animals that lived there? Think of the incredible variety of shapes, colors, and behaviors that must have excited them on that first day. Did they spend that day with Jesus and/or some of the angels? Did God give them instructions on Sabbathkeeping?
7. What do you think the rest of the universe was doing during that first Sabbath on this earth? Don't you suppose their attention was focused on what Adam and Eve would do with their new world?

All heaven took a deep and joyful interest in the creation of the world and of man. **Human beings were a new and distinct order.** They were made "in the image of God," and it was the Creator's design that they should populate

the earth. They were to live in close communion with heaven, receiving power from the Source of all power. Upheld by God, they were to live sinless lives.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* February 11, 1902, par. 1; *SD\** 7.2.† Compare *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, 1081.3.

8. It must have been hard to sleep at the end of that first day. Did God prepare a special place in the garden for them to sleep?
9. What do you think got the most attention from Adam and Eve on that first day? Did they get any guidance from God as to what to look for or what to do? Given what you know now about creation, what things do you think might have excited or surprised them the most? Remember that everything they encountered was new! Don't you think Adam and Eve were fascinated by all the different kinds of animals that God had created? What about the trees and flowers? Did they damage anything in the garden by wanting to touch it or handle it? How did they know what was edible and what was not? Did they walk around with any of the angels, even perhaps with God Himself?
10. Advance forward to about 1450 B.C. Moses was about to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. They had lost much of their knowledge about God by being kept in slavery for more than 100 years. They needed to rediscover many things about God and what He wanted from them. God needed to instruct them about keeping the Sabbath and having a special day, one-seventh of their time, to focus their attention on Him.
11. Read Exodus 16:14-29. What were the Israelites supposed to learn from the experience with the manna? How many of the surrounding nations heard about that experience? How much contact did the Israelites have with those other nations? Did any of the nearby wandering tribes try to come and taste the manna? It is important to notice that this experience is recorded in Exodus 16; it was not until Exodus 20 that the Ten Commandments were given. So, what should they have learned about God from the manna experience? It was a miracle that the food should appear at all and on time every morning except on Sabbath mornings. On Friday mornings, there was a double portion available. If they tried to keep the manna overnight on any other day, it would spoil and get rotten. But, the extra manna collected on Friday was perfectly good to eat the next day.
12. How much time do you think the children of Israel spent gathering manna each morning? How would you feel if you were suddenly introduced to a new food that you knew nothing about and, then, were told that you would be eating that food almost exclusively for the next 40 years? How much variety in taste were they able to enjoy by preparing it in different ways? Think of all the different ways potatoes are prepared! We need to remember that they had many animals that could have added milk and meat to their diet.
13. Look at Exodus 16:32-36. From these verses, we learn that each person was expected to collect about 2 quarts of manna a day. Furthermore, Moses was to keep a container of the manna for future generations so they would know what the manna was like. Obviously, it was kept by God in perfect condition. But, where was it kept? It was kept in the most holy place! Would ordinary Israelites have had any opportunity to taste it? Or, even see it?
14. Obviously, there were no churches in the wilderness for the children of Israel to attend. So, what were their Sabbaths like? Did they gather in small groups? Were there any "Sabbath school classes"? Did Moses lead the entire nation in some kind of service? As far as we know, except when they were moving, the people of Israel apparently did not have any special work to do except to prepare food, care for their animals, care for their tents, and educate their children. Did they take those challenges seriously?

15. Suppose you were dealing with a teenager in our day who is used to social media and television, and suppose he found the Sabbath boring. What could you do to make the Sabbath more meaningful? Sabbath should always be connected to special things to do and special experiences to have. It could be a chance to meet with friends. It could be a chance to explore nature. It could be a chance for some quality time with mom and dad.
16. We know that the children of Israel had a lot of ups and downs in their religious experience. Near the end of their time and facing Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah wrote these words:

**Jeremiah 17:19-27:** <sup>19</sup> The LORD said to me, “Jeremiah, go and announce my message at the People’s Gate, through which the kings of Judah enter and leave the city; then go to all the other gates of Jerusalem. <sup>20</sup>Tell the kings and all the people of Judah and everyone who lives in Jerusalem and enters these gates, to listen to what I say. <sup>21</sup>Tell them that if they love their lives, they must not carry any load on the Sabbath; they must not carry anything in through the gates of Jerusalem <sup>22</sup>or carry anything out of their houses on the Sabbath. They must not work on the Sabbath; they must observe it as a sacred day, as I commanded their ancestors. <sup>23</sup>Their ancestors did not listen to me or pay any attention. Instead, they became stubborn; they would not obey me or learn from me.

<sup>24</sup> “Tell these people that they must obey all my commands. They must not carry any load in through the gates of this city on the Sabbath. They must observe the Sabbath as a sacred day and must not do any work at all. <sup>25</sup>Then their kings and princes will enter the gates of Jerusalem and have the same royal power that David had. Together with the people of Judah and of Jerusalem, they will ride in chariots and on horses, and the city of Jerusalem will always be filled with people. <sup>26</sup>People will come from the towns of Judah and from the villages round Jerusalem; they will come from the territory of Benjamin, from the foothills, from the mountains, and from southern Judah. They will bring to my Temple burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and incense, as well as thank-offerings. <sup>27</sup>But they must obey me and observe the Sabbath as a sacred day. They must not carry any load through the gates of Jerusalem on that day, for if they do, I will set the gates of Jerusalem on fire. Fire will burn down the palaces of Jerusalem, and no one will be able to put it out.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Jeremiah 17:19–27). New York: American Bible Society.

17. Clearly, things were in a pretty bad condition in Jeremiah’s day. God felt that He had to give them very stern and strict guidelines which, as we now know, they did not follow.
18. More than 100 years earlier, Isaiah was given a message as well.

**Isaiah 58:1-14:** The LORD says, “Shout as loud as you can! Tell my people Israel about their sins! <sup>2</sup>They worship me every day, claiming that they are eager to know my ways and obey my laws. They say they want me to give them just laws and that they take pleasure in worshipping me.”

<sup>3</sup> The people ask, “Why should we fast if the LORD never notices? Why should we go without food if he pays no attention?”

The LORD says to them, “The truth is that at the same time as you fast, you pursue your own interests and oppress your workers. <sup>4</sup>Your fasting makes you

violent, and you quarrel and fight. Do you think this kind of fasting will make me listen to your prayers? <sup>5</sup>When you fast, you make yourselves suffer; you bow your heads low like a blade of grass, and spread out sackcloth and ashes to lie on. Is that what you call fasting? Do you think I will be pleased with that?

<sup>6</sup> **“The kind of fasting I want is this: remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. <sup>7</sup>Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives.**

<sup>8</sup> “Then my favour will shine on you like the morning sun, and your wounds will be quickly healed. I will always be with you to save you; my presence will protect you on every side. <sup>9</sup>When you pray, I will answer you. When you call to me, I will respond.

“If you put an end to oppression, to every gesture of contempt, and to every evil word; <sup>10</sup>if you give food to the hungry and satisfy those who are in need, then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon. <sup>11</sup>And I will always guide you and satisfy you with good things. I will keep you strong and well. You will be like a garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water that never runs dry. <sup>12</sup>Your people will rebuild what has long been in ruins, building again on the old foundations. You will be known as the people who rebuilt the walls, who restored the ruined houses.”

<sup>13</sup> The LORD says, “If you treat the Sabbath as sacred and do not pursue your own interests on that day; if you value my holy day and honour it by not travelling, working, or talking idly on that day, <sup>14</sup>then you will find the joy that comes from serving me. I will make you honoured all over the world, and you will enjoy the land I gave to your ancestor, Jacob. I, the LORD, have spoken.”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

19. What would God say about our churches or our Sabbath school classes today? Would either of these experiences recorded about Judah be close to what God might say now?
20. Sabbath was never intended by God to be a ritual experience with little change from week to week. What would happen if a Seventh-day Adventist Church or even a Sabbath school class chose to make Isaiah 58:13-14 their guidance for observing the Sabbath for a period of time? What would it mean *to delight in the Sabbath*? If we do not delight in the Sabbath, what can we do to change that fact?
21. There are some who feel like we should do something fairly radical like fasting and praying occasionally on the Sabbath day. But, what does it mean *to fast and pray*?

Now and onward to the close of time the people of God should be wide-awake, not trusting in their own wisdom, but wholly in the wisdom of their Leader. **They should set aside days for fasting and prayer. Entire abstinence from food should not be required, but they should deny themselves the food they usually enjoy, and partake of [a] plain, simple diet.** No one should lift up his soul unto vanity, walking in self-indulgence and pride, for this is a time that demands genuine humiliation and most earnest prayer. We are nearing the most important crisis that has ever come upon the world. If we are not wide-awake and watching, it will steal upon us as a thief. Satan is preparing to work through his human agencies in secrecy.—Ellen G.

White, *Manuscript Releases*,\* vol. 13, 330.2.<sup>†</sup> [Brackets and the word in brackets are in the electronic source.]<sup>‡</sup>

22. **The experiences of Jesus in which He confronted the Jewish religious leaders over the keeping of the Sabbath are quite remarkable.**

23. What do we know about Jewish synagogues in the days of Jesus? Normally, someone would read a passage of Scripture while standing up in front; then, he would sit down while he explained what he had learned or what the people should have learned from that passage. It turns out that even in His younger days, Jesus was very good at doing that.

Thus as He grew in wisdom and stature, Jesus increased in favor with God and man. He drew the sympathy of all hearts by showing Himself capable of sympathizing with all. The atmosphere of hope and courage that surrounded Him made Him a blessing in every home. And **often in the synagogue on the Sabbath day He was called upon to read the lesson from the prophets, and the hearts of the hearers thrilled as a new light shone out from the familiar words of the sacred text.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 74.2.<sup>†</sup>

24. But, as Jesus directed a new light on many of the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, many people came to think that maybe He was doing away with the teachings of the Old Testament. His response was as follows:

**Matthew 5:17-18:** <sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true. <sup>18</sup>Remember that as long as heaven and earth last, not the least point nor the smallest detail of the Law will be done away with—not until the end of all things.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

25. Consider some of the experiences in which Jesus interacted with the religious leaders over their observance of the Sabbath.

26. Read Matthew 12:1-13 and Luke 13:10-17. In these verses we have three brief stories about events that took place on the Sabbath: (1) The time when His disciples harvested grain and ate it on a Sabbath afternoon. (2) The time when a man with a paralyzed hand was healed by Jesus on the Sabbath. It is important to notice that in Matthew 12:14 it says: “Then the Pharisees left and made plans to kill Jesus!” How could such a conclusion come from the fact that Jesus was doing good? These events happened fairly early in Jesus’s Galilean ministry after He had been baptized in the fall of A.D. 27 and spent more than a year working quietly in Judea. So, these events took place between the second Passover of His ministry in the spring of A.D. 29 and the third Passover in the spring of A.D. 30. (3) The third event took place later when Jesus healed a woman in the synagogue on the Sabbath. It is important to notice these words in Luke 13:17 (*GNB*\*): “His answer made his enemies ashamed of themselves, while the people rejoiced over all the wonderful things that he did.”

27. **There was hardly a time when Jesus did anything significant on the Sabbath that did not lead to some kind of conflict with the Jewish leaders. These conflicts gave Jesus an opportunity to speak about some very important truths.**

28. Read Mark 2:27-28 (*NKJV*\*): “And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.’”

29. What do you suppose the people talked about after going home from the synagogue on a day when Jesus had performed a miracle there? How did they relate to the fact that the

Jewish leaders seemed to oppose Jesus so strongly? In our day, is it possible to get so caught up in keeping the rules and regulations—“the dos and don’ts,”—that we overlook what God intended for the Sabbath to mean to us? So, what can we do to change that?

30. **Surely, Jesus must have regarded His visits to the synagogues on the Sabbath as major teaching opportunities.**

**Luke 4:16:** Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures.—*Good News Bible*.\*

31. **Paul did much the same thing in his ministry.**

**Acts 13:16,26:** <sup>16</sup>Paul stood up, motioned with his hand, and began to speak:

“Fellow-Israelites and all Gentiles here who worship God: hear me!...

<sup>26</sup> “My fellow-Israelites, descendants of Abraham, and all Gentiles here who worship God: it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent!”—*Good News Bible*.\*

32. Seventh-day Adventists have often found themselves in disputes with other Christians over whether we should worship on Saturday or Sunday. We should not let the day on which we worship so consume our attention as to overlook what the Sabbath is supposed to be all about. **One of the questions that arises is whether or not the Sabbath was kept by the early apostles.**

33. Look at the following passages.

**Acts 16:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>On the Sabbath we went out of the city [of **Philippi**] to the riverside, where we thought there would be a place where Jews gathered for prayer. We sat down and talked to the women who gathered there. <sup>14</sup>One of those who heard us was Lydia from Thyatira, who was a dealer in purple cloth. She was a woman who worshipped God, and the Lord opened her mind to pay attention to what Paul was saying.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

**Acts 17:1-5:** Paul and Silas travelled on through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to **Thessalonica**, where there was a synagogue. <sup>2</sup>**According to his usual habit Paul went to the synagogue. There during three Sabbaths he held discussions with the people, quoting <sup>3</sup>and explaining the Scriptures and proving from them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from death.** “This Jesus whom I announce to you,” Paul said, “is the Messiah.” <sup>4</sup>Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas; so did many of the leading women and a large group of Greeks who worshipped God.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

**Acts 18:4:** He held discussions in the synagogue [in **Corinth**] every Sabbath, trying to convince both Jews and Greeks.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

34. **On each of these occasions, it is clear that Paul and his associates made every attempt to worship on the Sabbath even though it was many years after the death of Jesus.** Often, he was asked to speak in the synagogue. At times when there was no synagogue he could locate in a given city, he would go to a place by a river where the Jews might gather to seek God and pray. What do you suppose Paul talked about when he was given an opportunity to do so in a synagogue? It has been suggested by some scholars that what Jesus said to the two men walking on the road to Emmaus as recorded in Luke 24 might have served as a sermon outline for the apostles on many occasions thereafter. The outline would go something like this: (1) God guided His people, the Jewish people, for

many years through the experiences recorded in the Old Testament. (2) In those Old Testament Scriptures, a Messiah was promised. (3) Jesus of Nazareth has come and lived and died. (4) He fits the criteria for the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. (5) The church is growing rapidly, and God is calling both Jews and Gentiles to join His church.

35. Think of the experience of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Do you understand the history of the Adventist Church fairly well?

In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as Leader. **We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history. We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the mighty truths of the word of God. We have everything to be thankful for.**—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*,\* January 29, 1893, par. 5; 3SM\* 162.3.† Compare *Life Sketches* 196.2; *Testimonies to Ministers* 31.1.

36. **One thing that is obviously distinct in Christianity about Seventh-day Adventism is our keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath.**

No other institution which was committed to the Jews tended so fully to distinguish them from surrounding nations as did the Sabbath. God designed that its observance should designate them as His worshipers. It was to be a token of their separation from idolatry, and their connection with the true God. **But in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ.** When the command was given to Israel, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” the Lord said also to them, “Ye shall be holy men unto Me.” Exodus 20:8; 22:31. **Only thus could the Sabbath distinguish Israel as the worshipers of God.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 283.3.†

Then the Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 288.2-289.0.

37. How has your life been enriched by your Sabbath experiences? What could you do to enable yourself to learn more about God’s character on the Sabbath each week? Could you plan a Sabbath potluck for your Sabbath school class, giving all an opportunity to discuss some important issues? What about planning some kind of direct outreach to the community with the goal of spreading the gospel? There is no question about the fact that the Sabbath is a major educational opportunity for most Adventists. It should be a great opportunity for us to meet together with friends and jointly learn about God. How many non-Adventists do you have regular contact with in a given week? Do any of those people know what your beliefs are?
38. **How can we use our theological understandings from the Bible to attract others to the gospel?**
39. Of the 89 chapters in the four Gospels, 11 of them talk about issues concerning the Sabbath. **These Gospels were not written until at least 30 years after Jesus was dead, resurrected, and gone back to heaven. Would the Gospel writers still have been talking so much about the Sabbath if the Sabbath had been done away with?**

40. Often, we as Adventists think that we are the only ones who have carefully studied the Sabbath. But, that is not true. Consider the following points brought out in a PhD dissertation by Gnana Robinson, “The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath—A Comprehensive Exegetical Approach.” University of Hamburg, June 1975, pages 413-414:

1. Matthew and Luke’s genealogies are organized according to a sabbatical, sevenfold arrangement or one that is based on multiples of seven. Matthew, for example, offers three groups of 14 generations in which Abraham, David, and Jesus are the high points. Jesus is the continuation and culmination of the salvation pattern, which began in Israel. Luke has 77 generations, starting right from Creation to Jesus. Tying Jesus to Creation through genealogy shows that His salvation is for all of humanity, a fundamental truth that the Sabbath symbolizes.

2. The fact that Jesus is “Lord of the Sabbath” (*see Matt. 12:8*) means that the Sabbath belongs to the Messiah as it belonged to Yahweh in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant that God had with Israel, that they might know that the One who is Lord of the Sabbath is God (*Ezek. 20:20*) and that He is the one who sanctifies them (*Ezek. 20:12, Exod. 31:13*). The foreigner who kept Sabbath also was guaranteed to receive a “place . . . [and] an everlasting name” in His house (*Isa. 56:5*), which is to be a house of prayer “for all people” (*Isa. 56:7*). “In this sense, Sabbath is certainly given for the sake . . . of man, for his salvation.” Jesus reinforces these same points by asking rhetorically whether the Sabbath is a time for “sav[ing] life” (*Mark 3:4*) and freeing the suffering from “bond[age]” (*Luke 13:16*). The Sabbath is intimately connected with salvation in the Old Testament (*Deut. 5:15*), and it is the same with Jesus in the New.

3. Just as the temple in the Old Testament functioned as the place of forgiveness, release, and salvation, so Jesus, being greater than the temple, is now the locus of salvation. The salvation that Jesus brings is poignantly seen in His healings (the word for “save,” *sozo*, is often used to refer to physical healing [e.g., *Matt. 9:22, Mark 6:56, Luke 17:19*]). Jesus chooses to demonstrate His healing/salvation actions on the Sabbath (e.g., *Mark 3:4; Luke 13:10; John 5:1, 9*). Each of these cases and more could have waited till another day besides the Sabbath, but perhaps Jesus intends to “show the imminence of the Kingdom of God (Lk. 4:16-19; Lk. 7:22)” and purposefully links the Sabbath with salvation so that the Sabbath remains “the sign of the Messianic Kingdom.”—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 160-161.]<sup>§</sup> [Brackets and the content in the brackets in the paragraphs above are in the *Bible Study Guide*.]<sup>‡</sup>

41. Could we as individual Sabbath school classes or even small study groups improve our understanding of God’s character, the meaning of the Sabbath, and the purpose of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by giving study to it? Have you ever considered doing that?

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