

Day 1

A Love Story

SECTION ONE

Foundational Teachings

This devotional study is about God and His church. It is a love story; the greatest love story ever told. Throughout the Bible, human relationships are used to describe God and His people. In the Old Testament, God worked through Abraham's descendants—Israel. In the New Testament, the church was still composed of Abraham's faith seed: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

In the Old Testament, God's people are called "Zion." "Zion, Thou art my people" (Isaiah 51:16). Jeremiah wrote concerning God's attitude toward His people, "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3).

The imagery of parent and child is used to describe God's relation with His people. At a time when "Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me," God reassured them with the words, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me" (Isaiah 49:14–16).

A common theme used by God to describe His people is the relationship between husband and wife. The love story in the Song of Solomon is often interpreted as symbolic of God's relationship with His beloved people. Later Paul used this imagery to counsel husbands in their relationship with their wives: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might

present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:25–32).

In the New Testament, the church is so intimately connected to Christ that the church is called "the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27). The church is to be the earthly habitation of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see this intimate, close relationship described by Christ's own words: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day, ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. . . . Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:16–20, 23).

In these verses, Jesus clearly tells us that the believer is the dwelling place of the Godhead. The church is truly the "temple of God." Paul pointed this truth out when he asked the church in Corinth, "Know ye not that

ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Ellen White wrote concerning the church, "The church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 12).

No greater love is seen anywhere in the universe than the love God has shown by giving of Himself in the person of Jesus Christ for the salvation of His church. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16, 17). "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Romans 5:8, 9).

Yes, the story of God and His church is the greatest love story ever told. It will be the joy and song of the redeemed throughout the eternal ages. Truly, "God is love."

Personal Reflection and Discussion

How did God describe His love for His people in Jeremiah 31:3? _____

What reassuring words did God use in Isaiah when Israel thought God had forsaken them?

What relationship did Paul mention in Ephesians to describe the love of Christ for the church?

How close are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to God's people? _____

How did Ellen White describe the relationship between God and His church? _____

Prayer Focus

Ask God to

- fill you with His Spirit,
- revive the church,
- enable you to know in your heart that He loves you,
- bless those on your prayer list.

Day 2

The Bride of Christ

As we saw in yesterday's devotional, in both the Old and New Testament God expressed His love for Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. One image used to describe His relationship with His people is that of a bride. We see this expressed in Isaiah: "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isaiah 62:5). John, in the book of Revelation, also recorded this same description of the church: "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Revelation 21:9).

The bride of Christ is dearly beloved by Him. Jesus gave His life for her so that she could dwell with Him forever. Correspondingly, the bride is to prove herself faithful to her Bridegroom, Christ, and make herself ready for her Bridegroom when He comes to get her.

John described the importance of the bride being ready: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. . . . And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." "He is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful" (Revelation 19:6-9; 17:14).

What is involved in the bride making "herself ready"? This important question is answered by understanding the judgment that is presently taking place in

the heavenly sanctuary. The bride will be ready and the marriage to the Bridegroom will take place at the conclusion of the judgment when the declaration is made, "he that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Revelation 22:11). Ellen White describes this in the following quote: "I saw that every case was then decided for life or death. Jesus had blotted out the sins of his people. He had received His kingdom, and the atonement had been made for the subjects of His kingdom. While Jesus had been ministering in the Sanctuary, the judgment had been going on for the righteous dead, and then for the righteous living. The subjects of the kingdom were made up. The marriage of the Lamb was finished. And the kingdom, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, was given to Jesus, and the heirs of salvation, and Jesus was to reign as King of kings, and Lord of lords" (*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, pp. 197, 198).

As a result of the judgment, the "marriage of the Lamb" to His bride is "finished." The bride will be as Paul described in Ephesians: "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27). The bride will then be ready to be taken home to the Father by Christ the Bridegroom. This is why Jesus stated, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). He said this immediately after the declaration that the unjust and filthy will remain in that condition, and the righteous and holy will remain as they are.

Christ will gather His bride to take her home to His Father at His second coming. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

When Christ and His bride arrive at the Father’s

house, which He described in a conversation with His disciples, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2, 3), the marriage supper of the Lamb will take place. “And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9). What a glorious supper that will be!

Personal Reflection and Discussion

Who is the “bride” of Christ? _____

How does Christ’s bride make herself ready? _____

How does Paul describe the bride in Ephesians 5:27? _____

When does the marriage of the bride and Christ take place? _____

When does Christ get His bride, the church, to take her to His Father? _____

Prayer Focus

Ask God to

- fill you with His Spirit,
- revive the church,
- lead you to be ready for marriage to Christ at the end of the judgment,
- bless those on your prayer list.

Day 3

God's Love Questioned

Central to the war in heaven between Michael (Christ) and Lucifer (Satan) was the accusation that God was not worthy of respect and worship. “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven” (Revelation 12:7, 8).

The prophet Isaiah reveals more about Lucifer's conflict with God. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:12–14). Lucifer's sin of pride led him to seek to exalt himself above God—to seek to have authority above God's authority.

Ezekiel further describes Lucifer's fall into sin and his ultimate destruction using the symbol of “the king of Tyrus.”

Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed

cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee (Ezekiel 28:12–18).

This beautiful, wise being whose position was right next to God (“anointed cherub that covereth,” verse 14) allowed “iniquity,” “sin,” to fill his thoughts and heart, which led to his rebellion against God. His sinful rebellion spread so widely among the angels that one-third of them chose to believe Lucifer and took his side against God. “And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon [Satan], having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars [angels] of heaven, and did cast them to the earth” (Revelation 12:3, 4).

All these scriptures reveal one very important truth. Lucifer and the angels that followed him did not understand what a truly loving heavenly Father God is. John tells us, "God is love" (1 John 4:16). God's very nature is love, which tells us that His law is also founded on love. However, Lucifer insinuated that God was oppressing the angels with His law and that God was keeping them from being truly free.

These kinds of accusations had never been heard before, and it seems many began questioning the kind of being God actually was. One-third chose to believe the lie and follow Satan. Those angels who chose to remain loyal to God did so in faith, believing God was not

the kind of being Lucifer accused Him of being; rather, choosing to believe He was a loving heavenly Father.

God, of course, knew what was in the heart of both groups of angels, the loyal and the disloyal. He also knew that if the universe was to become eternally free of sin, He must reveal to the universe that He truly is a God of love. In fact, God knew these things back in eternity and established the everlasting covenant to save the fallen race that He knew would fall into sin under Satan's deceptions. This covenant to save humankind would be the greatest revelation of His love to a world fallen in sin, to the universe, and ultimately to Satan himself.

Personal Reflection and Discussion

What was Lucifer's accusation against God? _____

What sinful desire did Lucifer have in his heart concerning God? _____

How many angels followed Lucifer in rebellion against God? _____

What did Lucifer and the angels that followed him not understand about God? _____

What must be revealed about God to ensure a universe eternally free from sin? _____

Prayer Focus

Ask God to

- fill you with His Spirit,
- revive the church,
- lead you to better understand His love,
- bless those on your prayer list.