



**GREAT PEOPLE
OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT**

.....

MARTINE. MAYER

LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY

Living Way Bible Study, Inc. (LWBS) is an auxiliary of the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). All studies are written and/or edited by LCMS pastors. We have been providing studies to churches throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1982.

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WELCOME TO LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY (LWBS)

LWBS is a practical course of study with a special emphasis on the application of God's Word to the life of the individual. While emphasizing practical application, LWBS presents each book of the Bible as the holy, inspired, Word of God, the confessional position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Our purpose is to help equip believers to live joyfully in God's redeeming love and to share with others God's plan of salvation.

It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this study to help you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of our God and His Word. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* 2 Peter 3:18

STUDY STRUCTURE

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY SUGGESTS THIS FOUR-STEP METHOD

- 1. PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
- 2. SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
- 3. THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
- 4. THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

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GREAT PEOPLE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

MARTIN E. MAYER

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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REFERENCES:

Men Who Dared, Barbara Jurgensen.

Note: In the studies of Amos, Micah, and Malachi, I have been indebted to a book “Men Who Dared” by Barbara Jurgensen, the wife of a Lutheran student pastor. I used many of her paraphrases for the words the prophets spoke.

(This study, written in 1986 by Rev. Martin Mayer, was edited in 2017 and includes quotations from the Bibles listed above.)

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The purpose of the Old Testament is to tell us the story of God's chosen people and how He directed the course of their history until His promise, first given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15), could be fulfilled and the Savior, who would redeem the world from sin, could come into the world.

• • •

Many people question the value of the Old Testament as a resource for modern day living. In writing to Timothy, Paul gives us the reason for such a study. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

The purpose of the Old Testament is to tell us the story of God's chosen people and how He directed the course of their history until His promise, first given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15), could be fulfilled and the Savior, who would redeem the world from sin, could come into the world. This makes these writings vitally important, for they speak constantly of this coming Savior, the Messiah.

Another important consideration is that we are dealing today with the same God who was involved in the lives of the people of the Old Testament. Our God is unchangeable (Malachi 3:6; Psalm 102:27). What a comfort that is for us! The gracious manner in which God dealt with these people is the same way He deals with people today. Everything written about Him and His relationship with man is applicable to our day.

Another thing to be considered is how God arranged for us to have the story of the lives of these great people of the Old Testament recorded so that we might learn from them. As we examine these people, we will discover that they are very much like us. Since they were successful in both their earthly lives and in their relationship with God, there is much to be learned from them.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER STUDIES

In the study of the books of Genesis and Exodus, we find that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the patriarchal family of God's chosen people. They possessed no permanent land for their homes. However, God was determined they should have such a land. First, He needed to strengthen and solidify them as a people. This was accomplished by their sojourn in Egypt, the great trials they had to endure, and their exodus through the wilderness.

Through the leadership of Moses, God again brought these people to the land that He had promised to Abraham. Our study is going to show how they conquered that land and how they used it until the time when God's great promise of a Savior would be fulfilled. They became an established people with a permanent home who could build cities and develop industries.

The history of Israel could have been very simple if they had served the Lord and followed the leadership He provided for them. Unfortunately, they did not do so, and that is why Israel's history is a complex one.

Rather than confine ourselves to the study of one book in the Old Testament, we are going to examine the great people who had an important influence on God's chosen people. In that way, we will have an opportunity to look into most of the Old Testament.

Here are the Great People you will learn to know.

JOSHUA – Godly Nobleness

CALEB – Courage to Dare

RUTH – Picture of Faithfulness

GIDEON – Dare to Do Great Things

SAMSON – A Victorious Ending

DEBORAH – Faithful Obedience

SAMUEL – Supreme Dedication

SAUL – Good Beginning — Bad Ending

DAVID – Trials and Triumphs

DAVID – God's Man

JONATHAN – Brotherly Love

SOLOMON – True Blessedness

ELIJAH – Faithful Always

ELISHA – With God, All Things Are Possible

HEZEKIAH – With God's Blessing

JONAH – A Man on a Mission

JOSIAH – Bent on Reformation

ISAIAH – Vision of Isaiah

JEREMIAH – Suffering For Convictions

ESTHER – For Such a Time as This

DANIEL – Using Our Talents

SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO —
Let Your Light Shine

EZRA – Being Truly Satisfied

NEHEMIAH – Going Home

AMOS – God's Faithful Messenger

MICAH – Message of the Coming Messiah

MALACHI – God's Last Messenger Until...

May God bless us together as we look at these Great People of the Old Testament!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

JOSHUA

Pray that the Holy Spirit may guide you as you look today at the life of Joshua. We will be looking at portions of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.

Review:

1. After having read the INTRODUCTION, who are the “Great People” that were the patriarchal family of God’s chosen people?

2. What part did Moses play in the history of these people?

Lesson Preparation:

3. What is our first introduction to Joshua? (Exodus 17:9–13)

4. On Mount Sinai, God had just given His Law to the people and had then asked Moses to come to Him on the mountain. What are we told about Joshua in Exodus 24:13?

5. Joshua is being prepared for leadership. What did he deem essential in his training according to Exodus 33:11?

6. Look at Numbers 13:1–3, 8. For what important task was Joshua chosen? You noted a different spelling of his name here. This was a common name, and it became the root of many Jewish names, including the name of Jesus.

7. In Numbers 13:27–33, two reports were brought back by the spies. What was the report of the majority?

What was the report of the minority?

To which group did Joshua belong? (Numbers 14:6–9)

8. Because the people accepted the majority report, what was to happen to them? (Numbers 14:28–30)

What about Joshua?

9. Read Exodus 33:11 and Deuteronomy 31:14. For what had the Lord been preparing Joshua?

What characteristics would Joshua need?

According to Ephesians 3:16–17, what is necessary for strength?

10. In Joshua 1:1–2, what is God's command to Joshua?

In your own words, state the promise God gives to Joshua in 1:5. Does that apply to us today? See Hebrews 13:5–6.

What encouragement and exhortation is Joshua given in 1:6–7?

What was Joshua's formula for success as a strong leader? (1:8)

How does 1:9 encourage you?

11. From Joshua 5:13–15, describe the strengthening experience Joshua had as he stood before the walls of Jericho.

12. Read about the Fall of Jericho in Joshua, Chapter 6. According to Joshua 6:27, what was the result of this miraculous accomplishment?

13. What impression do you get of Joshua from Joshua 8:30–35?

14. Describe the unusual occurrence in the life of Joshua found in 10:12–14.

15. The battles of Joshua in conquering the land have been described in previous chapters. From Joshua 23:1–3, what conclusions do you draw about his accomplishment?

How do you suppose the people felt toward him?

To whom does he give the glory?

16. In Joshua 24:14–15, read the exhortation that Joshua makes to his people. What words would make a good wall motto for your home?

17. Joshua 24:24–28. What is the point Joshua is trying to impress upon his people?

Why do you suppose he is so concerned?

Where did Joshua write the covenant he had made with the people?

18. From Joshua 24:29–31, describe the manner of Joshua's death. What marvelous summary is given of his life?

Explain how Revelation 14:13 applies to Joshua.

19. What have you learned from Joshua's life that may benefit your spiritual life?



GREAT PEOPLE

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

JOSHUA



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How does the Holy Spirit bring about this nobleness in us? Just as He did with Joshua. He reminds us of the promise Jesus made: “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). He brings it through the Word of God as we read and study it. He adds the strengthening gift of the Lord’s Supper.



JOSHUA – GODLY NOBLENES

Have you set your eyes on your goal? Are you taking the road that leads to it? There are goals that are “out of this world.” They have nothing to do with money and possessions. We know the way to reach higher goals is to be in Jesus Christ. But there are always those who want to find their own way. Instead of pointing to Jesus, they point at themselves and their achievements.

In this life, God’s Word will help us decide on our goals. Once we have determined God-pleasing goals, we should allow nothing to hinder us in our pursuit of them. It is here that Joshua serves as a good example. We shall define Joshua’s life as the ultimate in GODLY NOBLENES. The purpose of our study is to show the development of this great man of God.

JOSHUA – THE SOLDIER

We have no information about the birth of Joshua except that he was of the tribe of Ephraim and his father’s name was Nun. We do know he was among those who came out of Egyptian slavery and knew the almighty power of God shown through the activity of Moses. No doubt this influenced him to develop a strong faith in God and a deep loyalty to Moses. We may have pictured Joshua as rather rugged, the kind of man a professional football scout would seek out today. He probably is the Old Testament counterpart of the big fisherman, Simon Peter, in the New Testament.



Although she was a prostitute, she became a tool in the hand of God. Rahab protected the spies when a search was made for them. As a result, she was told she would be preserved when the destruction of Jericho occurred by placing a red cord in her window. Even more interesting is the fact that Rahab became an ancestress of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5). The report the spies brought back gave Joshua the assurance the Lord would give Jericho into his hands (Joshua 2:24).

Joshua began the spiritual preparation of God's people for their great adventure. Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you" (Joshua 3:5). He then summoned all the people to him and rehearsed for them the things the Lord had promised (3:9). Joshua wanted the people to realize and remember that whatever success they achieved was a gift of God's grace. He then asked each tribe to select someone to bring a stone that would be used to erect a memorial.

The time had come for Israel to cross over the Jordan River into the land God had promised them. The Jordan River was at flood stage, but when the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the water, it divided and made a clear path of dry ground upon which all the people could walk into their land of promise (Joshua 3:1–17).

Joshua ordered all uncircumcised males to be circumcised. He wanted to be sure that all were in covenantal relationship with God. That same night Joshua stood near the walls of Jericho where an angel appeared to assure him God would deliver the city into his hands (Joshua 5:13–15).

THE CONQUEST OF THE LAND BEGINS

Jericho: It was a mighty walled city. Within the walls was the fortress, but most of the people lived outside the walls. God commanded the people to march around the walls each day for six days, and on the seventh day, they were to march around the walls seven times. At the end of the seventh march, they were to shout and make a great noise, and the walls of the city would come tumbling down (Joshua 6).

Ai: By God's order (Joshua 8:1), Ai was to be the next challenge. God's plan was that this city be taken by means of an ambush. By night, a great army moved to the far side of the city and remained hidden while the remainder of the troops marched upon the city and coaxed the army of Ai to come out for battle. The other army entered Ai from the rear and the soldiers of Ai were caught in a pincer movement. The result was complete destruction of Ai (Joshua 8:28).

Gibeon: These were the next people with whom Joshua intended to deal. They, however, were a wily people who sent ambassadors to Joshua pretending to have come from a far distance. They pleaded with Joshua not to invade their land, which was a great distance away. Joshua and his people believed them and made a treaty with their ambassadors promising them safety. It was three days before they discovered these men were from Gibeon. Because of the treaty, the people of Gibeon were spared, but they became servants to Israel (Joshua 9).

Amorites: The Amorites were led by five kings including the King of Jerusalem. They banded together when they heard what had happened to Jericho and Ai, and how Gibeon had made a peace treaty with the invading forces. They

decided to attack Gibeon and punish its people for their treachery, but the Gibeonites sent word to Joshua, who came to the defense of Gibeon, and a great battle ensued.

It was in this battle the great event took place for which Joshua is perhaps best remembered. Israel was prevailing in the battle, but the day was coming to a close and the enemy was not totally defeated. Joshua was afraid the enemy would escape during the night so he commanded the sun to stand still. For almost a whole day the sun did not move. Read the summary of this story in Joshua 10:12–14.

The victory was complete, but the five kings fled and hid themselves in caves where they were discovered and executed. In this way, it was known the Lord had given this land to the Israelites. These were God's special people, who needed to be a nation so His promise of salvation could, in His time, be fulfilled. While we may be disturbed by some of the cruelty perpetrated, we must remember that if God's plan was to be accomplished, these people with their pagan religions had to be driven from the land so God's people could remain faithful to Jehovah. Even in this day, there are those times when a Christian must fight for the Lord against the forces of evil and destruction (2 Cor. 10:4 and Eph. 6:12).

The Others: Joshua 11 records the manner in which Joshua completed the conquest of the land that would belong to God's people. The real purpose of this conquest is given in

a rather strange statement in Joshua 11:20. For God's people to remain His people they could not live among those who worshipped other gods. The same thing is true for us, and this is stated clearly in Matt. 7:15; 1 John 4:1; Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 6:14–18.

JOSHUA – THE LEADER

Now that the land belonged to Israel, the time had come for them to get organized as a nation. Joshua demonstrated the ability to make it happen. We recognize Joshua's talent as a gift of God. He was the kind of man God could use for this great task.

It was important for the twelve tribes to maintain their identity because of their various destinies. Salvation for the whole world would come from them, and from the tribe of Judah would come a Savior. For this reason, it was important that each tribe receive its own allotment of land, and Joshua made the assignments very wisely, no doubt keeping in mind the words Jacob had spoken to each of his sons as he gave them his final blessing (Genesis 49). Note that the tribe of Levi received no land, but was given cities in which to live scattered throughout the land, for they were to be of the priestly order. Note also that Joseph's descendants received two allotments for the tribe of Manasseh and the tribe of Ephraim.

Most important of all, Joshua was very intent on keeping his people close to God, and so he initiated a number of traditions that would always remind them of the great things God had done for them. Joshua

“Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”



established the Altar of Remembrance (Joshua 22:26–27), not as a place of worship, but as a constant reminder to all the tribes that they were dedicated to the Lord and thus joined to one another. This was pleasing to all the people and became a bond between them (Joshua 22:33–34).

His task completed, Joshua realized his days on earth were numbered so he called an assembly of all the people and gave them his final exhortation (Joshua 23 & 24). Listen to his words in Joshua 23:11 for they characterize this man: “Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God.” Again, in Joshua 24:14: “Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.” What a ring of GODLY NOBLENES in these words!

Joshua’s final words will always remain with us (Joshua 24:15): “And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Here was a man of 110 years, his life was drawing to a close, but he still had love for his people and wanted to inspire them. What gave this ancient man of God such strength? As in the cases of Moses, Abraham, and Noah, Joshua trusted himself into the hands of God. He remembered the promise God had made to be with him wherever he went (Joshua 1:9). That promise had proved true.

JOSHUA’S LIFE FOR US

Godly Nobleness — Surely, we need it too! It is not ours by nature, but given by the power of the Holy Spirit. We see it in the dedicated people of God who give unselfishly of themselves and of their material wealth so that others may be benefited. We see this nobleness in faith-filled people who go out to speak to those who do not know Jesus. We see this nobleness in young people who are determined to walk in the ways of the Lord though others go their own way.

How does the Holy Spirit bring about this nobleness in us? Just as He did with Joshua. He reminds us of the promise Jesus made: “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). He brings it through the Word of God as we read and study it. He adds the strengthening gift of the Lord’s Supper. God does not force anyone to use the gifts He offers, but He makes His grace available to all through Word and Sacrament.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

CALEB

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you examine the passages in Numbers and in Joshua that pertain to the life of Caleb.

Review:

1. From your notes on the life of Joshua, what impressed you about this man? What was essential in his preparation for the big task God assigned him?

Numbers 13:

2. From which tribe did Caleb come? _____

What was important about the destiny of this tribe? _____

For what responsibility was Caleb chosen? _____

3. Beginning at verse 27, detail the report of the spies when they returned. What were the positives?

What were the negatives?

How would you define the impression the reports left on the people?

4. What was Caleb’s immediate reaction? (From our last lesson, we know Joshua stood with him.)

5. Examine a few Bible passages to show why we could stand with Caleb too, note what you learn from each one.

1 Peter 5:7 _____

Psalm 50:15 _____

Psalm 37:5 _____

Matthew 19:26 _____

Hebrews 1:3 _____

6. Beginning at Numbers 14:8–9, note the words of Caleb and Joshua. What did they recognize as important if they were to succeed in taking the land?

7. List some of the things you think would be very essential to succeed in an “important venture.”

8. What was the punishment for Israel because they failed to trust the Lord? (Num. 14:26–30):

When the children of Israel are nearing the Promised Land of Canaan, Moses hopes to fill the people with enthusiasm for their new home (Numbers 13:1–2, 8). He decides to send a spy from each of the twelve tribes into this land to determine the kind of country to which the Lord is leading them. One of those spies is Joshua.

Joshua's tribe chose him to be their representative because he was a natural leader. When the spies returned, they reported with fear and trembling that the land was well fortified and the enemy was mighty. We are not surprised that it was Joshua and the old fire horse, Caleb, who stated their belief that the Lord would give them this Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people to go forward.

At this point, Israel rebelled against the Lord and begged to go back to Egypt and a life of slavery. As a result, the Lord punished them by declaring they would wander in the wilderness until every last one of them was dead, and that only Joshua and Caleb would be allowed to enter the Promised Land. This meant forty years of wandering in the wilderness (Numbers 14:30–33).

Soon after Israel entered the wilderness, Moses realized he needed to organize an army and chose Joshua to be his military leader (Exodus 17:8–15). He was a valiant warrior, and with the help of God, his untrained army won many a battle. This resulted in him becoming Moses' right-hand man.

After the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, God ordered Moses to ascend the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments recorded on two slabs of stone and the other laws by which the children of Israel were to be guided. Moses took Joshua with him up the mountain. By now, Joshua is described as Moses' minister for it was evident to all that he fought for the glory of the Lord with God's blessing (Ex. 24:12–13).

Joshua's preparation for leading Israel included the cultivation of a strong relationship with God. We are made aware of this in Ex. 33:9–11. The tabernacle, which God ordered His people to construct, was the center of their worship. The people could not enter the tabernacle, but stood around it while Moses entered and communicated with God. Moses then brought God's messages to the people. The cloudy pillar was the sign of God's presence. In this instance, we are told that Joshua entered the tabernacle with Moses and they became prayer partners. When Moses left the tabernacle, probably because of pressing duties, Joshua remained behind and continued his communication with God.

The Bible emphasizes throughout the need for this kind of a relationship with God (Ephesians 6:10–18). If we are to be strong and successful, we need God's help and His constant guidance, and this comes to us as we meditate upon His Word and seek Him in prayer.

JOSHUA – THE CONQUEROR

As always, when a person lives in close communion with God, He reaches out with the promise of His blessing. So the Lord assured Joshua that He would also bless him, and that he would be successful in all the battles into which he would lead Israel's army (Joshua 1:5–6).

The time had come for the big venture. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the time had finally arrived when God's people would possess the land that He had promised them. Certain preparations needed to be made, and the Lord guided Joshua through all of them (Joshua 1:8–9). It was necessary for Joshua and his army to know something of the lay of the land, so he ordered spies into the city of Jericho. This would be their first challenge.

The two spies entered Jericho and were received into the home of a woman named Rahab.

Although she was a prostitute, she became a tool in the hand of God. Rahab protected the spies when a search was made for them. As a result, she was told she would be preserved when the destruction of Jericho occurred by placing a red cord in her window. Even more interesting is the fact that Rahab became an ancestress of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5). The report the spies brought back gave Joshua the assurance the Lord would give Jericho into his hands (Joshua 2:24).

Joshua began the spiritual preparation of God's people for their great adventure. Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you" (Joshua 3:5). He then summoned all the people to him and rehearsed for them the things the Lord had promised (3:9). Joshua wanted the people to realize and remember that whatever success they achieved was a gift of God's grace. He then asked each tribe to select someone to bring a stone that would be used to erect a memorial.

The time had come for Israel to cross over the Jordan River into the land God had promised them. The Jordan River was at flood stage, but when the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the water, it divided and made a clear path of dry ground upon which all the people could walk into their land of promise (Joshua 3:1–17).

Joshua ordered all uncircumcised males to be circumcised. He wanted to be sure that all were in covenantal relationship with God. That same night Joshua stood near the walls of Jericho where an angel appeared to assure him God would deliver the city into his hands (Joshua 5:13–15).

THE CONQUEST OF THE LAND BEGINS

Jericho: It was a mighty walled city. Within the walls was the fortress, but most of the people lived outside the walls. God commanded the people to march around the walls each day for six days, and on the seventh day, they were to march around the walls seven times. At the end of the seventh march, they were to shout and make a great noise, and the walls of the city would come tumbling down (Joshua 6).

Ai: By God's order (Joshua 8:1), Ai was to be the next challenge. God's plan was that this city be taken by means of an ambush. By night, a great army moved to the far side of the city and remained hidden while the remainder of the troops marched upon the city and coaxed the army of Ai to come out for battle. The other army entered Ai from the rear and the soldiers of Ai were caught in a pincer movement. The result was complete destruction of Ai (Joshua 8:28).

Gibeon: These were the next people with whom Joshua intended to deal. They, however, were a wily people who sent ambassadors to Joshua pretending to have come from a far distance. They pleaded with Joshua not to invade their land, which was a great distance away. Joshua and his people believed them and made a treaty with their ambassadors promising them safety. It was three days before they discovered these men were from Gibeon. Because of the treaty, the people of Gibeon were spared, but they became servants to Israel (Joshua 9).

Amorites: The Amorites were led by five kings including the King of Jerusalem. They banded together when they heard what had happened to Jericho and Ai, and how Gibeon had made a peace treaty with the invading forces. They

PERSONAL APPLICATION

CALEB

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7. List some of the things you think would be very essential to succeed in an “important venture.”

8. What was the punishment for Israel because they failed to trust the Lord? (Num. 14:26–30):

What about Caleb and Joshua?

9. From Numbers 14:24, give God's estimate of Caleb and tell what you think He meant by having "another" or "different" spirit.

10. What important time had come for Israel? (Num. 34:13–5:3)

Give Caleb's role: _____

Who did not receive an inheritance? _____

What concession was made to the tribe of Levi? _____

11. Using Joshua 14:6–15, what words of the Lord does Caleb remind Joshua?

How many years have passed since that time? _____

How old is Caleb at the writing of this narrative? _____

Give the name and description of the area Caleb requests. (Numbers 13:28 & 33)

12. Caleb's land was a mighty stronghold and many important events happened there. Identify a few of these from the following references:

Joshua 20:7–9

2 Samuel 2:3–4

2 Samuel 15:9–10

13. In Joshua 15:13–15, substantiate what we have already discovered about Caleb. How would you describe him?

14. List ways we might develop God-pleasing qualities in our lives by reviewing Romans 8:26–39. Specify one area in your life you would like to grow.

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If you truly believe that Jesus Christ is your Savior, then live in that faith, show your faith in the manner in which you perform your daily tasks, in how you react to the people around you.

CALEB – COURAGE TO DARE

As we study the life of Caleb, there is something that attracts us to him. He had the **COURAGE TO DARE**. It takes courage to be a Christian today. To bear witness for Christ takes courage, coupled with a winsome love that only the Lord Jesus can awaken in us. Courage employed with prayer draws upon God’s powerhouse so that great things can be accomplished. Courage does not look at the size or the power of the enemy, but rather at the necessity for victory over that enemy. Surely, we desire the kind of courage only God can give us. It is the courage not only to die decently, but to live bravely.

“What is courage?” asked a little boy of his mother. “Is it like our cat when she arches her back and spits when she is afraid?” The mother did not answer at once, but her answer came later as they walked together past a field that had been charred by fire. In the middle of the field, they saw a lone small flower. The mother explained, “There is courage, son, to stand alone when all around you there is destruction – a fragile red flower growing in a fire-swept land.”

Caleb was a man of courage. One might think of him as a “little old warhorse.” We have known people like that who, though advanced in years, were ready for any challenge, and we can’t help but admire them. So looking at Caleb, we want to learn about the **COURAGE TO DARE**.

CALEB AS A SPY*NUMBERS 13:2-16*

The children of Israel approached the land of promise from the South. After their dramatic escape from Egypt, Moses, at the behest of God, decided to send spies to appraise the land the Lord had promised to give them for a permanent home. A man was chosen from each of the twelve tribes to be such a spy.

Joshua was chosen from the tribe of Ephraim, and Caleb was chosen from the important tribe of Judah. This is our first introduction to Caleb (Numbers 13:6). He was about forty years old, no stripling, but a man of maturity. No doubt he had a family that was dependent upon him, but he willingly accepted this assignment.

Think of the courage it takes to be a spy. It means going into enemy territory, not knowing what you might encounter, and also knowing that, if you are caught, it will most likely mean your death. You have to be very brave and surpassingly clever. Would you have that kind of courage?

**CALEB AND THE SPIES
GIVE THEIR REPORT***NUMBERS 13:27-33, 14:6-9*

Caleb and the other spies went into the land of promise, and after passing through most of it, they returned to report on what they found. They were unanimous in their report that it was a wonderful land, a land “flowing with milk and honey” (Num. 13:27). They liked what they saw (Num. 14:7). Perhaps you recall from Bible story books the picture of these spies returning, carrying in their hands the produce of the land with a huge cluster of grapes suspended from a pole. Everyone was impressed with the richness of this land in contrast to the terrible desert they had traversed.

However, this is not the end of the report. The spies went on to declare that the land was inhabited by mighty nations who had been trained in warfare for generations, and who lived in great fortified cities. Their conclusion was that it would be impossible for a peace-loving people like themselves, who had languished in slavery all these years, to capture the land (Num. 13:28-29, 33). They said they were like grasshoppers in the presence of these armed people. Their report was discouraging!

But there was a minority report given by Caleb and Joshua. It was Caleb who dared to speak up against the majority. What the other spies had said was true, he acknowledged, but the people should remember that they had a great resource who would make it possible for them to conquer this land. That resource was their God who had seen them through everything thus far. He would fight for them (Num. 14:7-9).

What a powerful lesson for us! At times, the Lord places before us challenges which demand special effort on our part. We may be inclined to look at them from our point of view and think, “This is impossible.” We forget we have the Lord as our resource and with Him nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). If God has convinced us that a certain thing needs to be done, then we should also have the faith in His name to go forward, knowing He will help us do it.

**CALEB HELPS JOSHUA
DIVIDE THE LAND***NUMBERS 34:17-19*

With great assistance from God, Joshua had succeeded in conquering the land. We are not told if Caleb played an active part along with Joshua in the conquest of Canaan. Now the time had come when the land would be divided among the various tribes.

Joshua summoned Caleb (a man 85 years old) to serve on the committee that would divide the land. Caleb's name is mentioned first which might indicate that he headed the group.

We are never too old to render valuable service to the Lord. Moses was 80 years old when he was summoned to lead his people out of Egypt. Joshua was a man advanced in years when he led the victorious armies of Israel. It is for us to find those areas where we can best use the talents and experiences the Lord has given us to make our declining years of life a real joy.

CALEB CLAIMS HIS POSSESSION

JOSHUA 14:6-12

The Lord promised Caleb he would have a special portion of the land (Num. 14:24), and now the time had come for him to claim it. There was one section that everyone had shied away from because it was inhabited by the Anakim. They were the most powerful among the enemies, people who were indeed giants in stature, and had great walled cities high in the mountains.

Now comes this 85-year-old man who says, "I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming" (Joshua 14:11). It is recorded that Caleb outlived six wives and had 47 children. What a man!

How can we help but love this old warhorse? He is not ready to take it easy, he wants a challenge. We all should want such a challenge. There is such a challenge. It is the major one in the life of a Christian. In 1 John

2:4-6, John says, "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this, we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." He has reminded us that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sins, and when we sin, we have an advocate with the Father. It is this same Jesus, the Righteous One, who has made payment for all of our sins. John has pleaded with us to believe in Jesus, to put our complete trust in Him, and Him alone.

Do you want a big challenge? Here it is: If you truly believe that Jesus Christ is your Savior, then live in that faith, show your faith in the manner in which you perform your daily tasks, in how you react to the people around you. As the love of Jesus was a complete love, a sacrificing love, an overwhelming love, an all-embracing love, let us learn to walk in the same way that He walked. That is the challenge. Are you willing to accept it? Do you have **THE COURAGE TO DARE?**

CALEB SUCCEEDS IN CONQUERING HIS LAND

JOSHUA 14:13-15

Not only did Caleb want a big challenge. He had no fear when the challenge was put before him. This old man knew exactly what he was getting into. He had been there; he had spied the land; he knew what giants the people were who inhabited this land. He also knew they far outnumbered his people, but he was not afraid. He said, "So now give me this hill country of which the LORD spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim

were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the LORD said” (Joshua 14:12).

God had promised His people they would win the victory over all of their enemies, and Caleb knew there was no enemy too mighty for the Lord to conquer. It was a lesson Israel should have learned a long time ago, and one they would certainly learn in the years to come. Gideon would defeat the Midianites with 300 men, armed with trumpets, pitchers and torches; the lone warrior, Samson, would defeat the mighty Philistines; and young David would slay the giant Goliath. Read the Psalms and you will be impressed with the trust David had in his God.

For God there are no enemies that cannot be defeated. Do you believe this? Who are your enemies? Let’s think of your real enemies – the secret sins within that so often defeat you. These are the potent enemies. We have no power within ourselves to defeat them and to cope with the misery and pain they cause us. But when Jesus, as our Savior, becomes our Champion, we can deal with these sins, for “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Even our secret sins cannot destroy us, because in Jesus they can be forgiven, and from Him we can receive the strength to overcome them (Eph. 3:16).

Nor can our sins known to other people destroy us, the sins we willfully commit against our neighbor because of anger or hatred, lust or greed. They may indeed bring a punishment or a chastisement upon us because of the hurt we have done to others, but they cannot destroy us because Jesus has also earned forgiveness for these sins.

Nor can death destroy us, and it, too, is a terrible enemy each one of us is going to have to deal with. But Jesus has also overcome death for us by His own death and resurrection. Death is indeed swallowed up in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:55–57). Actually, our death now becomes a glorious triumph; it is the gateway to heaven. It is true as Jesus promised, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19).

Nor can the mighty power of the devil destroy us because Jesus has also defeated this terrible enemy. Through Jesus, we receive the strength to resist the temptations that Satan is constantly directing our way. And should we fall, Jesus is right there to pick us up again. With His strength, we can again stand on our feet and start over.

In short, none of our enemies should cause us fear, even as the enemies of Caleb caused him no fear. Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, and our complete trust in the love of our God, we are assured that we shall be more than conquerors through Him who loved us and gave Himself for us (Romans 8:37). It makes it possible for us to be a Caleb with the COURAGE TO DARE. When we know that our enemies cannot defeat us, then we can go forward for the Lord with every confidence.

THE CONCLUSION

JOSHUA 14:15

The story of Caleb ends with these words, “And the land had rest from war.” What a marvelous story. What COURAGE TO DARE! Do you have rest from war when you simply run away from conflict? Or, do you have rest when, with God’s help, you are able to overcome your enemies in a God-pleasing way? Behind our effort to win should be the desire to win the enemy for the Lord and His Kingdom, not to destroy, but to save. We need such COURAGE TO DARE.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

BOOK OF RUTH

Seek guidance from the Holy Spirit in prayer before you read the book of Ruth.

Review

1. After you have read the notes on Caleb, list enemies you have that you can hope to overcome only with the help of Jesus.

2. What was the greatest lesson you learned from the life of Caleb?

Ruth 1:1–6

3. What catastrophe introduces the story of Ruth? How did the Bethlehemite try to deal with the catastrophe?

4. List the family members.

5. In Moab, what further disaster befell this family?

6. How do the following references shed light on the lesson this family learned?

a. Acts 14:22

b. 1 Corinthians 10:13

c. 1 Peter 1:7

Ruth 1:7–22

7. What decision did Naomi make for herself? For her daughters-in-law?

8. How did Orpah meet this suggestion?

Write the well-known words Ruth spoke to Naomi.

9. Give the pessimistic words with which Naomi greeted the people of Bethlehem. Upon whom did she place the blame for her misfortunes?

10. From Romans 8, try to find the answer you might have given to Naomi in her grief:

Verse 18

Verse 28 _____

Verse 31 _____

Verse 32 _____

Verse 35 _____

Verse 37 _____

Verse 38–39 _____

Ruth 2:1–23

11. Under what circumstances did Ruth meet Boaz? From the dictionary, give the meaning of the word “glean.”

12. What are some of the things Boaz said that show he was attracted to Ruth? Describe two kindnesses that Boaz showed to Ruth.

Ruth 3:1–18

13. Write the suggestion Naomi made to Ruth that would make Boaz more conscious of her.

14. The behavior of Ruth certainly could have been misconstrued. But what did Boaz say to show that he did not regard her as a loose woman?

15. Of what ancient Jewish law did Boaz remind Ruth (Deut. 25:5; Mark 12:19)? By suggesting this law, Boaz indicated he wanted to marry Ruth, but what was one hindrance?

Ruth 4:1–22

16. Describe how Boaz and the others resolved the matter for Ruth and Naomi.

17. The Ruth and Boaz story had a happy ending. What was the name given their son? _____
 What relation was he to King David and what honor was to befall Ruth? (Matt. 1:1, 5–6)

18. Share with your group one characteristic of Ruth that you admire.



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In Ruth, we have the basic characteristics which make women God's special creation. At the center is their willingness to serve others.



RUTH – PICTURE OF FAITHFULNESS

God the Creator made many beautiful things. Nature simply abounds in beauty. Visit the Butchart Gardens outside Victoria on Vancouver Island or the Canadian Rockies with their glaciers and Lake Louise. Take a drive through Glacier National Park in Montana, Yellowstone, or Yosemite, and you will see how beautifully the Lord has created this world. All this comes from the hand of Him who cares for us (Psalm 121:2).

Nor is it simply the spectacular places that speak His glory. Visit the Wild Animal Park in San Diego or the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, or take time to observe the birds outside your own window and appreciate the variety. Each animal, each bird is unique, each one able to live in a particular area of the world showing the loving care of their Creator.

We know the crown of all God's creation was mankind, whom God made in His own image that he might have dominion over all the rest of His creation. Then God made a woman from one of Adam's ribs. She was designed to be a suitable helper, friend, and wife.

It seems in our age women have become the backbone of our society. In many instances, it is the woman who draws the family together, has the most to do with the molding of the character of the children, and who most often plays the major role in the church life of the family. Is there any area of life today where she does not play an important role? It is no

mere sentiment to say that women are the most lovely creatures of God's creation. You may be even more inclined to agree with me as we look at the life of Ruth. We want to use her as a model of Christian behavior, for we see in her a PICTURE OF FAITHFULNESS.

RUTH – A FAITHFUL CHILD OF GOD

Ruth had been born of heathen parents, yet through her husband and his family, she had come to believe in Yahweh, the God of Israel. Having accepted Him as her God, she did not merely give Him lip service. She was determined to live the way a true child of God is expected to live, remembering she was now one of His faithful followers.

Ruth's life became one of service. She was first devoted to the husband of her youth until he died (Ruth 1:2–5). She was particularly dedicated to the care of her mother-in-law, Naomi (1:16–17). She was devoted to her second husband, Boaz, who had shown her so much kindness. She poured her love upon her son, Obed. She was determined to please her adopted people. But above all, she was devoted to her God. Wouldn't it be wonderful for any woman to have such words written as her memorial?

Ruth did not think of her own personal welfare, considering instead only what would help others. As a result, she was a great source of comfort to others. Her warm-hearted devotion had its effect on everyone she touched, and each was a better person for having known her. This is what makes her such a wonderful example for all Christians.

In Ruth, we have the basic characteristics which make women God's special creation. At the center is their willingness to serve others. Praise the Lord for all the women today who have patterned their lives after Ruth, who

entirely forget themselves in their efforts and desires to help the members of their family and the people in their community and church. They become a real source of strength and comfort when difficulties arise. Their personality cheers all who come in contact with them.

We would be remiss if we did not mention the secret that made Ruth an obedient child of God. It was her deep faith in the Lord (2:12). She absolutely trusted in His goodness, even though she had lost the husband of her youth, the husband who had helped her find the Lord. She seems not to have questioned the Lord's way with her. She realized that in God's sight, she was a frail and sinful woman, but God still desired her salvation. As a part of the faith community of Israel, she looked forward to the Messiah to come, and her faith gave her life new and solid footing.

Ruth did not know the role she was going to play in the drama of redemption, that she was going to be the great-grandmother of King David and the ancestor of our precious Lord Jesus. But she did know that God was faithful to His Word! Her steadfast faith in God and His promises made her a child of God. This same faith in God and His promises, now come true in Jesus Christ, is the motivating force in Christian women today. They have been loved with such a great love it gives them an eagerness to love others.

RUTH – A FAITHFUL DAUGHTER

Being a child of God, Ruth would show herself to be a faithful daughter. In this age of rebellion, daughters can learn from Ruth rather than follow a course that demands release from the role of wife or mother, and freedom to go their own way and do their own thing. Instead, they would do well to listen to the advice of concerned mothers who have gone through the same frustrations and can speak from experience.

By being a faithful daughter, a young woman can show herself to be lovely. Recall again the touching scene when Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, who had lost her husband in the land of Moab, decided to return to her home in Bethlehem because the famine had ended. She instructed her two daughters-in-law, both of whom had lost their husbands, to remain in Moab where they would have a better chance for happiness because they could more easily find suitable husbands.

One cannot forget the words of Ruth which have been cherished over the years: "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (1:16). Think, too, of the manner in which Ruth cared for her mother-in-law when they returned to Bethlehem. Naomi was probably old and very frail, and you sense that Ruth tried to help her any way she could. She made every effort to make life easier for Naomi, and before long, everyone was speaking about her faithfulness to Naomi.

RUTH – A DEVOTED WIFE

For every woman, the biblical ideal is faithfulness to the Lord in the life "to which God has called [her]" (1 Cor. 7:17). For some, as Paul explains in the same chapter to the Corinthians, it may be the single life. For most it is the married life.

Ruth was a model of a devoted wife. We regret the Bible doesn't go into detail in describing the married life of this God-fearing woman because we feel she might have given us some good advice. From what we know of Ruth, she no doubt was a faithful wife to Naomi's son, who died soon after their marriage. Naomi was still able to keep a close relationship with her.

When we refer to the Christian woman as a wife, we are thinking of:

- women who by their faith in God and faithfulness to their husbands have influenced their husbands in such a way that together they have been drawn nearer to the Lord;
- women who have done all they could to help their husbands succeed in whatever vocation they may have chosen for themselves and made whatever sacrifices were necessary; and
- women who have encouraged their husbands when things were rough and have been a source of joy to their husbands.

Such a woman does not have to strive for position or equality. She already has it in the love and respect of her husband. She is fulfilling a high role in life. She deserves the highest honor her husband can bestow upon her. What a blessing when her husband cooperates with her to make life as pleasant for her as he possibly can. She is God's helpmate for him.

The manner in which Ruth negotiated the courtship that led to her marriage was perfectly proper. We should not allow our modern day social standards to flavor what actually happened. We need to be aware the customs of those days were different from ours. Ruth's action in going to Boaz on the threshing room floor merely indicated to him that she was available and ready for marriage. We do not know if Boaz had been married before. He very likely was a bachelor with timid bachelor ways. Yet it appears both of them were attracted to each other from the beginning and love developed rapidly.

Once Boaz realized what had happened, the door was opened to him by the ancient law of

levirate marriage. This law allowed the closest of kin to take a widow as his wife, and if she was childless, to provide a child to the honor of her deceased husband. However, in Boaz' case there was one kinsman who was closer to Ruth than he, and so it was necessary for Boaz to clear up this matter with his relative first. In the end, love conquered and a blissful marriage was consummated. Boaz foreshadows Christ Himself, who could be called our own "kinsman redeemer," even as we are, collectively, His bride!

RUTH – A FAITHFUL MOTHER

Another gift of God to women is the role of motherhood. Even as not all women are called to be wives, so not all wives are able to be mothers. But all may know the joy of their salvation and the certainty that each may serve the Lord "in whatever state" as contented children of God (Phil. 4:11). Many have discovered that motherhood may be more than biological. It may include the nurturing care that any woman may give a child.

We see Ruth, who had been widowed and then lived as a single person for a time, in her glory as a very faithful mother. By now, we know Ruth was a very special mother, even as Elizabeth and Mary were in New Testament times. Her son Obed (remember Boaz belonged to the tribe of Judah) was the one through whom the Messiah's line of descent was to continue, all the way back to Abraham and forward through King David. Ruth actually was the grandmother, many generations removed, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What a blessed thing it is for us that Ruth was able to be a mother, and thus the hope of salvation could be carried on. God, in His love, knew what He was doing when He chose Ruth to be the wife of Boaz, when He led her into the land of Israel with her mother-in-law, Naomi; when He caused her to say, "Your people shall be my people, and

your God my God." Boaz was the one who had to perpetuate the Messianic line and he needed a wife to do so.

The ancient Hebrews had a proverb, "God could not be everywhere, so He made mothers." This expresses a beautiful thought even though we know that God can be everywhere. Mothers are able to render valuable service for the Lord to others so God's purpose in the lives of those around them can be accomplished.

For this reason, the Lord gives women not only the glorious experience of motherhood, but also the strength and the wisdom to be good mothers, if they will allow Him to work in them. This means they are to lean heavily upon Him, follow the instructions He has outlined in His Word, and seek His assistance as they approach Him in prayer.

If we have, or had, pious and God-fearing mothers, God gave us a priceless treasure. If we have been "mothered" by someone else whom God provided at a time we needed such mothering, we've also known that blessing. We need to show continual appreciation to our mothers in the many things we can do for them. What a privilege that is! What an honor! What a responsibility!

Ruth surely is an example of Christian womanhood because she presents to us a PICTURE OF FAITHFULNESS.

(Note: I did not attempt to find substantiating Bible passages for all the things I wrote because I felt that my ideas are in the spirit of what the Bible tells us when it speaks of human relationships).

PERSONAL APPLICATION

GIDEON

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your study of Judges. Read Chapters 6–8 before you answer the questions in this lesson.

Review

1. From your notes, mention a few ways Ruth proved herself to be a child of God.

2. In what way was Ruth a very special mother?

Judges 6:1–10

3. We need to know more about the details of this drama:

Why did the situation come about? _____

Who were the enemies? _____

How are they described? _____

How did Israel try to escape these enemies? _____

What other calamity did they have to endure? _____

4. How did the Lord attempt to call the people back to Himself?

5. Of what did the Lord remind them?

Judges 6:11–40

6. Describe Gideon's meeting with the angel of the Lord. (6:11–23)

What was the gist of the angel's message? Give Gideon's reaction.

What proof did Gideon request of the angel?

Describe the sign given.

What fear did Gideon have?

How do you think you would react to Gideon's experience?

7. Having been convinced the Lord had chosen him, what was the first thing the Lord told Gideon to do?
8. What does this teach us about our own needs if we are going to serve the Lord?
9. How did the people of the town react when they discovered what Gideon had done?
10. How did Gideon ask the Lord to show him that he would be successful in delivering the children of Israel?

11. What can we learn about testing from the following passages?

Job 7:17–19

1 Corinthians 3:13

Philippians 1:10

1 John 4:1

Judges 7:1–14

12. Describe the Lord's reaction to the number of people who were ready to fight with Gideon. What reason did God give for His response?

13. According to the Lord's direction, how was Gideon to thin out the number of soldiers?

14. Gideon acted as his own spy. What omen suggested he would succeed?

Judges 7:15–25

15. Describe the battle strategy Gideon gave his 300 soldiers.

16. How did the Lord gain the victory?

17. Write what these Bible Passages mean to your life.

1 Corinthians 15:57:

Ephesians 6:10–11:

Judges 8:1–35

18. The greatness of Gideon appears when the people wanted to make him king. Give his answer.

19. In the end, what folly did Gideon commit and what does it teach us?

20. Describe the death of Gideon and the action of the Israelites soon after he died.

21. What lesson did you learn from the life of Gideon that you feel is helpful to you?



GREAT PEOPLE

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

GIDEON



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GIDEON – DARE TO DO GREAT THINGS

There should burn in the heart of all believers the desire to tell others about the love of God as they have experienced it in their own lives. As we begin to count our blessings, we will soon realize how wonderfully God has dealt with us. The result surely should be that we want to speak of His love, and above all, how that love was revealed to us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Often, it is not so much the things we say as the life we live that effectively witnesses to our faith. People of our day have developed a defense mechanism that allows them to tune out if they do not want to hear what is being said. They can look at the speaker and not hear a word he is saying, but when they see that person in action, they pay attention. Jesus was a preacher and an effective speaker, so people were very much influenced by what He said, but they were even more impressed by what Jesus did. They came to hear Jesus speak, but they stayed to watch His deeds of love and kindness. He proved by His life that He meant what He said.

What are we telling people around us in our daily lives? Are they discovering that Jesus is the Master of our lives and that we have complete confidence He will lead us on the path that is best for us? We will be considering this as we study the life of Gideon, a remarkable man who felt inferior, but who, because he trusted the Lord, was able to accomplish much. As we study his life, a pointed challenge is going to come to us: **DARE TO DO GREAT THINGS.**



THE TIME OF THE JUDGES

For three hundred years after Joshua conquered the land of Canaan and divided the land among the children of Israel, there were alternate periods of oppression and deliverance for God's people. The Israelites constantly rebelled against the Lord and then sought His forgiveness. Each time they needed deliverance, the Lord would raise up a leader for them. These leaders were called "judges." Usually a judge's activity began by leading the Israelites against the present enemy, and ended by helping the people in all other matters.

During this time, the Lord showed His might to His people in many wonderful ways. They believed when God was with them they would succeed and could dare to do great things. How good it is when the leaders of our nation also realize that great things can only be accomplished with the blessing of God.

Gideon became a judge in the year 1250 BC. This was about 175 years after Joshua's death. The enemies at that time were the Midianites, "the children of the east," descendants of Abraham and Keturah, the wife of Abraham's old age. It was among these people that Moses lived during his exile from Egypt. They were friendly to Israel at first, but gradually joined their neighbors in their hatred for God's people. In Gideon's time they were harassing Israel in every way.

THE LORD CALLS GIDEON

JUDGES 6:1-21

Israel was in terrible distress because of their disobedience against God (Judges 6:1). Once again, the people turned to the Lord in repentance and asked Him to deliver them from their enemies (6:7). A God-sent prophet spoke to them of God's grace.

In answer to their plea, the angel of the Lord came to Gideon and told him God had chosen him to lead His people against the Midianites (6:11-12). But Gideon, who was just a simple wheat farmer, felt completely unworthy to undertake such a great task,

for he thought about all that was necessary for such a venture. Can you blame him? He wanted to make sure he understood the Lord correctly, because he would not dare to do such a great thing unless he knew the Lord was with him and that he had the Lord's full approval.

We might well take Gideon's attitude to heart, asking ourselves whether the things we are doing for the Lord actually meet with His approval and will receive His blessing. This could be the reason why many proposed ventures in the church have failed: divine guidance was not sought.

The greeting of the angel should have already fortified Gideon. "And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor'" (6:12). But Gideon was not satisfied he was the proper person, so he asked for a sign. The sign given consisted of the burning of the food Gideon had provided the angel (6:18-21).

GIDEON BEGINS TO SHOW HIS COURAGE

JUDGES 6:22-35

At the Lord's behest, Gideon cast down the altar that his father had erected to the god Baal. In its place, he built an altar to the Lord and offered sacrifice upon it. So steeped were the people in their worship of Baal that when the men of the city learned what had happened to Baal's altar, they insisted Gideon's father give them his son so they could kill him. The father refused, showing his disregard for Baal. His words need to be repeated, "Let Baal contend against him because he broke down his altar" (6:32).

When Gideon's deed became known to the Midianites, they prepared to avenge their god. This aroused Gideon and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. The Holy Spirit is powerful, as we well know from what He has done in us. Gideon sent messengers to the various tribes of Israel requesting volunteer troops to fight the Midianites. The Israelites responded.

GIDEON'S ASSURANCE THAT GOD IS WITH HIM

JUDGES 6:36-40

Gideon again wants to be sure that he is doing God's will. He requests another test from the Lord dealing with the fleece of a sheep. Once again, the Lord shows him that He is with him all the way, and that he need have no fear for he will succeed.

This is an important lesson. We claim to be Christians and we take for granted the Lord is with us in every endeavor. We may even claim that everything we do is God's will. We forget that we still have a sinful nature and, at times, the things we do may come from a false motive. Our pride and our selfishness tell us to do something we think will benefit us.

In our endeavor to get ahead, we like to think the Lord is always right there with us. But does that always follow? We need to be right with God. It makes no difference how good a life we live because when God looks at our lives, He sees the sins we commit. But God, in His love for us, has also provided a cover for sin in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. As we look at our lives with deep remorse, and turn with sincere sorrow to God for forgiveness in Christ Jesus, we become right with God. As we allow our faith in Jesus to work in us, to guide us and direct us, we can truly say that God is on our side and we can DARE TO DO GREAT THINGS.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR ARE MADE

JUDGES 7:1-8

Remember it is the Lord who does the great things through us. How clearly He showed that to Gideon. The army of the Midianites was a mighty host. When Gideon issued the order to fight these enemies, 32,000 men responded to fight. The Lord told Gideon He did not want so large an army; everyone who really did not want to fight should go home.

After the fearful departed, there remained yet 10,000 troops. God said this was still too many. He suggested they decrease the number in this way: Gideon was to take his men to the river and tell them to drink. All those who would kneel down and drink right out of the river would be sent home. But all who took water into their hands and drank were to remain with the army.

Three hundred men remained. That's all! That is all the army God needed. With three hundred men, God could defeat the Midianites. With three hundred men and God on his side, Gideon could DARE TO DO GREAT THINGS.

GIDEON SPIES OUT THE ENEMY

After the selection of the army was made, there was no time to waste. The Lord came to Gideon to tell him he should personally spy out the Midianite army. He spoke with such confidence Gideon had no doubt the Lord would have him succeed (Judges 7:9). We may expect the same (Romans 8:37-39).

God wanted Gideon to know what the Midianites thought about the coming battle because He knew this would encourage Gideon (Judges 7:11). Gideon saw the great army of the Midianites encamped with all their war equipment while he had only three hundred men.

Hidden very near the camp, Gideon overheard the conversation of two Midianite soldiers. One was telling a dream he had in which he foresaw the very thing that was going to happen to their army, and the other at once recognized the truth as he thought about the dream. He realized God would give the Midianite army into the hands of Gideon (7:14). What an encouragement this was to Gideon!

THE BATTLE PLANS

JUDGES 7:15–25

We see great things can happen when we note the orders God gave to Gideon for the battle. He was to divide three hundred men into three groups, and they were to approach the camp of the Midianites from three directions. If you really want to see that this was the Lord's victory, then observe how His soldiers were armed.

A trumpet – would you like to see a modern soldier fight with a trumpet in one hand?

A clay jar – who would carry a clay jar out on the battlefield?

A torch – in a surprise attack at night you do not carry torches.

But these were the weapons Gideon's army was to use.

The three battalions approached the camp of the Midianites. At a given signal, each was to give a big blast on the trumpet, then break the clay jar, and hold aloft the hidden torch. All were to shout at the top of their voices: "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon." It was a combined attack with the Lord fighting at the side of Gideon — an unbeatable force.

Now if that kind of battle strategy would succeed, it had to be of the Lord. As it happened, many Midianites were killed that night, but not one by Israel. In the confusion, the enemy attacked one another. Gideon had dared great things for the Lord and had succeeded. The Midianites were completely defeated; they fled, leaving thousands dead, and leaving all their wealth behind as booty for God's people. You can read about the utter destruction of Midian in Judges 7:19–25, when the united forces of Israel fought under the leadership of Gideon, the wheat farmer.

THE CHRISTIAN BATTLE TODAY

As God's people, we can also dare to do great things for the Lord because He has given us a strategy. The method God gives us is as strange as Israel's attack against the Midianites. But again, it is the Lord who gains the victory. Let us be aware of the great task He asks us to do: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). This surely is a great challenge.

Can we do it? Not by ourselves because the forces we are asked to fight are too formidable for us. We are to fight the mighty legions of hell, the forces of the devil, the forces of irreligion and unbelief, the powers that refuse to look upon Jesus as Lord and Savior. At first glance, that surely is too mighty an enemy for us to conquer.

What is more, the forces of God are very small. The number of those who believe that Jesus died and rose again for their salvation is truly a small number in comparison with those who

are filled with doubt and unbelief and just plain indifference. Yet we are told to go out and defeat these forces of unbelief (Eph. 6:10–17). This is truly a challenging task. Yet we dare to undertake it, for we know the Lord fights at our side.

Let us also consider the weapons God asks us to use to win the battle in this age of so many sophisticated arsenals. Not wealth, not might, not cold steel, not destructive bombs, but a story, a simple story that begins with a baby born in a stable in Bethlehem, and ends at an empty grave in a garden. With that simple story, we are to defeat God's enemies. How obvious it is that we cannot hope to win the victory by ourselves!

It is God who wins the victory for us with these weapons. As we tell the story, the Holy Spirit goes to work and the heart of the person to whom we speak is gradually opened until that person sees Jesus as Lord and Savior, as the Son of God and Redeemer from sin. He is ready to give his life to that Savior. By faith, he finds peace and joy, and is able to look forward to living eternally with God in heaven. It is a miracle that anyone is a Christian!

God wants us to continue the battle, to dare great things for Him. Are you ready to meet that challenge? Are you ready to tell the story of Jesus? Ready to reach out to win the souls of people away from the devil, and his wicked forces, to God and His great blessings? You will be ready if you truly trust God. Accept the challenge and do great things for the Lord.

GIDEON SOLIDIFIES THE NATION

JUDGES 8:1–23

After this great victory, it was only natural that Israel should look to Gideon for leadership, and he did succeed in bringing the nation together again. This was difficult because each of the tribes strove to maintain their individuality. It was twelve nations in one, even as we have fifty states in one nation.

The idea of having a permanent king was already in the minds of the people, and they came to Gideon, asking him to accept that position (8:22). But again Gideon shows his wonderful character when he responds, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you" (8:23).

However, the Bible does not want us to think of Gideon as a perfect saint, and so it also reveals to us one of the missteps Gideon took when his pride came to the forefront. You can read it in Judges 8:24–31. As long as we live here on earth, there is no one who is perfect (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Phil. 3:12).

GIDEON'S END

JUDGES 8:32–35

Gideon died at a good old age as a devout child of God. It is sad that the wonderful influence he had upon these people did not last long after his death. Instead, they returned to their old ways.

Here is our final lesson: We should indeed honor those who lead us in our spiritual life, and do this by following in their footsteps. This is especially true when they have been the ones to lead us to DARE GREAT THINGS FOR THE LORD.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

SAMSON

Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit that He will give you understanding as you read Judges, Chapters 13 to 16.

1. From your notes, what lesson did you learn from Gideon that you will apply to your life?

2. What does it appear that Gideon was conscious of at all times?

Judges 13

3. Describe the situation in Israel at this time.

4. What wondrous event is foretold that God often seems to use in the deliverance of His people?

Of whom are we reminded? (Isaiah 7:14) _____

5. What was to be unusual about the way Samson was raised?

6. What was the destiny of this child? Of whom are we reminded?

7. Dealing with the angel, Manoah and his wife knew they had a close relationship with God. How did they feel about this? (Judges 13:22)

8. What clue do you get from verse 25 that would indicate why the writer to the Hebrews would include Samson among the heroes of faith? (Hebrews 11:32)

Judges 14

9. What was the weakness in the strong man Samson?

10. What unusual fact is revealed to us in Judges 14:4 concerning the Lord?

11. As Samson and his parents traveled to meet the woman of his heart, describe what happened. Keep this in mind because of something that will happen afterwards (note Judges 14:8).

12. What did Samson propose at the wedding to create some entertainment?

How did the people at the wedding finally discover his secret?

13. What was the prize to the winner and how did Samson pay the price?

Remember this was part of God's plan to weaken and gradually defeat the Philistines.

Judges 15:1–8

14. It is evident that Samson did not live continually with his wife, but when he went to be with her, her father denied him the right. From what happened in the previous chapter, could you give the reason why he would deny him?

15. How did Samson, as God's agent, vent his anger on the Philistines?

16. From verses 6–8, tell what happened to Samson's wife and what Samson did with the help of the Lord.

17. While Samson excelled in physical strength, by now we realize he was lacking in spiritual strength. What do each of the following passages tell you about this?

Ephesians 6:10–11 _____

1 Corinthians 16:13 _____

Colossians 1:11 _____

2 Timothy 2:1 _____

Judges 15:9–20

18. Describe what happened when the armies of the Philistines encamped against the Israelites. What did they propose to do?

Under what circumstances did Samson allow this?

What was the result?

How did God give Samson a drink?

Judges 16

19. This chapter brings us to the well-known story of Samson and his relationship with Delilah. Relate the story and give as many details as you can find about each of the characters. Describe the death of Samson and the summary of Samson's life found in Judges 16:30.

20. What have you learned for your life from Samson's life?



GREAT PEOPLE

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

SAMSON



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The overall lesson we want to learn from the life of Samson is how the spiritual life can overcome all the forces of evil, and in the end gain the victory.

SAMSON – A VICTORIOUS ENDING

In order to satisfy spouse or parents, many people go through the act of becoming a member of the church, but never really have any intention of giving themselves wholly to Jesus, the Lord of the Church, so that He may completely control their lives. It is to this concept that the life of Samson points.

I must confess that when I began the study of the Great People of the Old Testament, I was anticipating the time when I could write about Samson. Samson is a man of real contrasts, a man in whom two forces, which are found in each of us, are so prominent. On one hand, there is the will to please God because His Spirit is at work in us, and on the other hand, there is still our sinful nature through which the devil would love to grab hold of us. There is this constant battle going on in each of us: the desire to do the right thing, and that hidden drive which craves to do the wrong thing. There is the strength in us that comes from God and the weakness that is in our sinful nature. To summarize, both are trying to gain the upper hand:

There is the desire to serve God and there is the lust for sin.

There is the loving God and the destroying Satan, both attempting to control us (Romans 7:15–25).

We believe in the devil because we believe in Jesus Christ with all our hearts as our Lord and Savior, and we know that He believed in the devil.



He spoke of him frequently (Matt. 25:41; Luke 8:12; John 8:44). Jesus was tempted by the devil; He had to fight him continually. He was ridiculed by the devil, accused by the devil, and finally crucified by the devil's followers. Among other things, it was the purpose of His life here on earth to defeat the devil, so that the devil would not be able to control our lives (1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14). Through the strength that we, by faith, receive from Jesus, we will be able to resist the temptations that the devil directs at us (James 4:7; Eph. 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8–9). Thus, we are able to win the ultimate victory, so we can be “more than conquerors through him who loved us” and gave Himself for us (Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:57).

The overall lesson we want to learn from the life of Samson is how the spiritual life can overcome all the forces of evil, and in the end gain the victory. This lesson comes through to us in a subtle way. It certainly is visible as we study the life of this unusual man, the strong man of the Bible. Perhaps you remember as a child going to the circus where they often had a sideshow featuring the strong man who could bend iron pipes and straighten horseshoes. This is a picture to us of Samson.

SAMSON'S BIRTH ANNOUNCED

JUDGES 13:1–7

It is interesting to note that Samson's birth was a wondrous surprise, as was the case in the births of a number of the great people who had vital roles to play in God's plan for the salvation of the world. All this proves God's hand in working out the details of His plan for us, according to His blueprint. At this stage, the people of Israel were being oppressed by the Philistines because, once again, Israel had done evil in the sight of the Lord.

The people were truly depressed and begged God for deliverance from their enemies. God, knowing that they must be delivered for His purpose of salvation, very carefully prepared this deliverance in the person of Samson. Even as God made His people wait for full salvation in the Savior, so the people of Israel had to

wait on God's perfect timing before Samson would be able to destroy the power of the Philistines.

Observe that an angel visited the mother of Samson, who was barren, to tell her that she would now have a son. We at once think of the circumstances attending the birth of Samuel years later, and even of our Savior, the Virgin Birth announced by the angel Gabriel. Thus, God made possible the birth of Samson who had an important role to fill in His plans.

But let us not think that this is an unusual occurrence. God has given birth to each one of us, too, because we each have a role to fulfill. Our role in life may not be like that of Samson, but in God's eyes, each of us is important for the working of His plan. There is something we are appointed to do which will be helpful in God's beautiful world. Of course, we will not be able to fulfill our role if we do not have a relationship with Him, which is possible only through our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

From the very outset, God indicated to Samson's parents that their son was designated for a great task and needed to be “dedicated to the Lord.” There were the external signs of this special dedication; his hair should never be cut, and he should never be allowed to drink any strong drink. But these were the mere external signs of his dedication, and were accompanied by spiritual preparation. His parents, who were God-fearing people, instructed him in the ways of the Lord, and surely explained to him the great promise God had made concerning the salvation of His people.

We pray that you have been dedicated to the Lord. This means in external matters, you are going to be different. It does not mean you need to have long hair but you are going to let your light shine so that your good works will be seen and glorify your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12). In order to assure this may be possible, there also must be spiritual preparation.

We are told that the Spirit of the Lord began to stir within Samson (Judges 12:25). It is not enough that we try to do the right thing. The Spirit of the Lord has to stir in us, to motivate and move us to do the will of God. God's Spirit reminds us what the love of God has done for us, especially in sending His Son into the world as our Savior.

In Judges 13, there is other information regarding the birth of Samson recorded. You can read this for yourself.

SAMSON'S FIRST CONTACT WITH THE PHILISTINES

JUDGES 14:1-4

Even with all his God-given spiritual endowments, as well as the guidance his godly parents were attempting to give him, Samson still had within him a sinful nature which was struggling to gain control of him.

Samson, like every one of us, had his weaknesses. His biggest weakness was his lust for ungodly women. His parents had warned him about this danger. They had pleaded with him to choose a godly woman of their own people who would be a real blessing to him, an inspiration, and a great help in his important venture. But his sinful nature would not heed their guidance. It was this weakness that finally caused the undoing of Samson, who had such a potential for greatness.

First, there was his desire for a Philistine woman. He asked his parents to get her for his wife, because those things were arranged by the parents. They objected. The Bible states that they did not know it was God's way of using Samson against the Philistines.

God can use the wicked ways of men to accomplish His purposes. Samson was to deliver his people from the Philistines, and because of his weakness, he was probably brought into closer contact with the Philistines than if he had listened

to his parents and married a fine Jewish maiden. This is not said to justify Samson's acts.

SAMSON'S FIRST MARRIAGE

JUDGES 14:5-20

These verses reveal much about Samson. We see his fearlessness in which he dealt with the lion, the ingenious way in which he directed attention to himself at the wedding by proposing the riddle and the demand for loyalty, which he expected of his wife but did not receive. Samson realized he had a role to play in God's deliverance of his people and that this would require the death of many Philistines.

There is no difficulty for us in the riddle he proposed because we know what had happened. It is interesting that he calls his wife a "heifer." We surely do not condone the things Samson did. But these things are recorded that we might see the mighty acts of strength by which Samson destroyed so many of the enemy. In his weakness, Samson had strength, for the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and with the Spirit's aid, he was able to defeat these enemies.

We are helpless before the onslaughts of Satan. We can easily fall before the many temptations he places in our way. It is obvious these temptations are intensifying as we observe all around us the world's moral indecency. It is a struggle to remain pure and chaste. But when the Spirit of the Lord dwells within us, and He does if we, by faith, have taken the Lord Jesus into our hearts as our Savior, then His strength will help us to overcome our weaknesses. If we think we can win this victory by our own strength, we are mistaken, but with God's strength, we can be victorious (Phil. 4:13; John 15:5; 2 Cor. 12:9).

There are a few things we need to remember. As long as Christ is within us, the devil is on the outside. As long as you meet the devil, and you sense his temptations as they come at you, you

know you are not going his way. It is only when you do not meet him anymore and are no longer aware of his temptations that you need to stop and check the direction your life is taking. It all comes down to this; following the devil means abandoning God. This does not happen overnight. If you are concerned you have given way to the devil, it's a good sign. In faith, may you find strength to overcome spiritually.

SAMSON'S NEW CONFRONTATION

JUDGES 15:1–8

Samson is not ready to abandon his own people and so he commuted from his home to his wife's home only to discover she had been given to another in his absence. This again aroused in Samson the realization that the Philistines were not his people and they needed to be destroyed because of what they were doing to his people. With another great act of strength, Samson wrought havoc among the Philistines, an act that today would certainly bring a storm of protest from all who love animals. This in turn resulted in the death of his wife and her family and in turn provoked in Samson the need to destroy the Philistines who were now his avowed enemies.

ANOTHER ONE-MAN ASSAULT

JUDGES 15:9–20

Because the Philistines were a mighty nation who had subjugated the Israelites, they knew they would have to deal with Samson's attacks. The entire Philistine army had invaded the land of Israel and camped there. This caused great concern among Israel, for they were in no way able to meet this mighty force, and they blamed Samson for getting them into this difficult situation. Not realizing

that God was trying to deliver them from the Philistines (even though they prayed for Him to do so), they were ready to deliver Samson into the hands of their enemies, knowing he would surely be put to death.

They bound Samson with two new cords to deliver him to the Philistines, but the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and he broke the cords as though they were nothing. Then, using the jawbone of an ass, Samson killed a thousand of the enemy.

Afterward, Samson was thirsty and God, in a miraculous way, provided refreshment. We cannot but draw a comparison to how weary we become at times in the battle that we, as God's children, wage against the forces of evil. However, we know God always provides for us the water of life in Jesus. As a result, we are able to go on.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

JUDGES 16:1–20

We will not spend much time on Samson's relationship with Delilah because Hollywood has done such a "good" job in telling us the story. It has a natural appeal for worldly people with Delilah being a prostitute and Samson being who he was.

We observe the terrible deception Delilah perpetrated upon Samson at the behest of her people to discover the secret of Samson's strength. As a result, Samson was shorn of his strength as Delilah arranged for the cutting of his hair. This act was symbolic of the fact that Samson had, for the moment, cut himself off from the Lord and His helpful blessing.

Rejoice that through Christ and the Spirit, the Comforter, who He promised to send into your heart, you can overcome and will win the victory in the end. Praise the Lord you know Jesus who has made that victory possible for you!



SAMSON IN DEFEAT

JUDGES 16:21-25

In his weakness, Samson was captured by the Philistines. This time there was no escape because he had willfully disobeyed the Lord. His enemies tried to make sure he would never harass them again; they blinded Samson and cast him into a prison cell, a helpless man. We can apply this plight of Samson to what could happen to those who turn from the Lord.

The Bible makes note of the fact that Samson's hair began to grow again, indicating to us there was a chance for Samson to return to the Lord. God is a God of grace and mercy, slow to anger and loving with tender compassion.

For the Philistines this was a time for celebration. They arranged a festival day at the main temple to their god, Dagon, where they intended to ridicule the God of the Israelites who could not protect Samson against their might. To heighten the excitement of their celebration, they decided to bring Samson into the temple for all to see. This once majestic hero was now blind and bound as a slave with the dust of the flourmill covering him. And so it goes with God's children when they turn from Him.

SAMSON IN FINAL VICTORY

JUDGES 16:26-31

Praise the Lord, Samson repented! He turned to the Lord in his extremity and the Lord did not forsake him for the Lord still had a task for him. His people were not yet rescued and the promise of salvation was in jeopardy until that rescue was complete.

The temple of Dagon was filled with thousands of Philistines. So great was the throng they even sat on the roof to get some idea of what was going on. Into this throng, Samson was brought. He then prayed to the Lord again in faith and received from Him once again the strength to bring about the final crushing blow that would destroy the Philistines. Samson caused the collapse of the huge temple, which meant all within and without were killed or crippled, including all the important people in the kingdom. Of course, Samson also died, but in his death, he actually killed more of his enemies than he had killed in his lifetime. God had given him the victory, the Philistine nation was crushed and God's people were liberated and free to be His people.

CONCLUSION

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose"
(Romans 8:28).

Rejoice that through Christ and the Spirit, the Comforter, who He promised to send into your heart, you can overcome and will win the victory in the end. Praise the Lord you know Jesus who has made that victory possible for you!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

DEBORAH

May the Holy Spirit guide you in your Bible study as you read Judges, Chapters 4 and 5.

Review

1. From your notes, list what you consider Samson's strengths:

Samson's weaknesses:

Judges 4:1–3

2. Ehud had been one of Israel's judges. When did the children of Israel again forsake the Lord?

3. Who were the people who harassed Israel at this time? _____

Who was Jabin? _____

Who was Sisera? _____

4. What would your reaction have been if you had been in the Lord's place when the people turned to you for help?

Judges 4:4–9

5. List as many facts about Deborah as you can from verses 4–9.

6. Deborah's willingness to assume this new role teaches us something about obedience. Tell what you learn about obedience from the following:

Exodus 19:5 _____

1 Samuel 15:22 _____

Jeremiah 7:23 _____

Acts 5:29 _____

Hebrews 5:9 _____

7. In your own words, tell exactly what Deborah revealed to Barak? Of what was Deborah absolutely convinced?

8. How does Barak show his weakness of faith and what would the end result be?

9. When God places a challenge before us, how can we assure ourselves we are to accept the challenge?

Judges 4:10–14

10. How did Sisera respond when he learned of the gathering of Israel?

11. What challenging words did Deborah speak to Barak?

12. In John 14:1–3, where is the Lord leading the way for us?

Judges 4:15–17

13. Describe the battle.

14. What phrase of this description has the most meaning for you?

15. How did Sisera react to the heat of battle?

Judges 4:18–24

16. Describe the action of Jael to Sisera. What do you think motivated Jael to do this ruthless act to her enemy? In this act of Jael, a prophecy made earlier by Deborah was fulfilled (verse 9).

17. While we are not told, what role do you think Deborah played behind the scenes?

What lesson are we able to learn from her?

Judges 4 & 5

18. What do you think is the main truth the Lord wants us to learn in this lesson?



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By faith, we accept Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away all our sins. With His forgiveness, we enter into a new relationship where our whole purpose in life is to please God and His Son, our Savior, by the way we live. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).



DEBORAH – FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE

It has been said that obedience is the beginning of Christian virtues. Jesus expects more from us than mere admiration. He wants obedience. While we should bow our knees before Him in adoration and praise, He also wants to see our faith in action.

As we obey God out of love for Him, we learn to appreciate what a wonderful God we have. In telling us what He expects of us, He is reminding us that He truly does love us. The things He tells us to do always serve our good so we can say that obedience is the greatest of all disciplines.

People frequently offer a half-hearted obedience — only as much as they need to get by — and thus they hope to satisfy their conscience. Such an attitude is misguided. It isn’t really obedience; it is a pretense. As we examine the life of Deborah, one of the great women of the Old Testament, we see her Faithful Obedience. In the same story, we will observe Barak and his Reluctant Obedience.

THE SITUATION

JUDGES 4:1–3

Once again, Israel had sinned against the Lord. After all these years, they simply would not learn their lesson. It shows us that, because of sin, man is opposed to the will of God (Genesis 8:21; Matthew 15:19; Romans 1:21). We hear much about the progress man is supposed to have made, but in his basic nature, he has not changed at all through the years. The

lawlessness of our day makes this painfully clear. Man has always been self-centered, proud, jealous and resentful. He has always needed the help of God to overcome his weaknesses as he does today. Despite all our sophistication and scientific advances, it is apparent that only God can help us through the difficulties that confront us today. May we realize it before it is too late!

Because Israel had once again turned from the Lord, He attempted to bring them back by placing a scourge on them. This scourge was the Canaanite nation. These vicious people lived in the area of present-day Jerusalem. They made a fortress so impregnable that it was not conquered until the time of King David. Their King, Jabin, and the general of his armies, Sisera, had cruelly oppressed God's people for twenty years.

Once again, as the people were suffering, they realized their sins and knew they deserved what was happening to them. They repented of these sins, turned to the Lord and asked Him to forgive them and help them.

DEBORAH BECOMES A JUDGE

JUDGES 4:4-5

Deborah was not the only woman who became a leader of her people. Perhaps you have read the story of Joan of Arc, the French young woman who led the armies of her country to deliver them from their enemies. In the late 1900s, the British people chose Margaret Thatcher as their Prime Minister. She was to be responsible to lead them out of the chaos into which England had fallen. We also think of Golda Meir, who became the first woman Prime Minister of Israel in 1969.

We should not be surprised to find a similar situation in the Bible, where a woman becomes the leader of her people. In this lesson we are introduced to Deborah.

After the death of Joshua, who had conquered the Promised Land and then divided it among the twelve tribes, there was no chosen leader for the people.

God intended to rule His people directly in what we call a "theocracy." But in their rebelliousness, the people were still turning away from the Lord and getting themselves into abysmal situations. When the people returned to the Lord in repentance, He would choose a person to lead them against their enemies. These leaders were called judges, which seems strange to us because we have a different idea about what a judge does. We have already examined the life of two such judges, Gideon and Samson. Preceding these was a woman, Deborah, who was the third judge in Israel, who followed a man named Ehud, the "left-handed" judge.

God had carefully prepared Deborah for her position by endowing her with special gifts, which allowed her to become a natural leader for her people. She had been given the gift of prophecy, which meant more than just foretelling the future. This gift allowed her to speak to the people about their world situation and to help prepare them. It is the same use of the word that we find so often in the New Testament. A prophet is a person who can search the Word of God and then interpret it for the contemporary situation.

Since Deborah had this ability, she became well known and the people recognized she was God's mouthpiece as she spoke about His will. They turned to her for guidance. Thus, she was able to establish herself as a judge. She now steps forward as the leader whom God uses to deliver His people from the Canaanites and their mighty forces under General Sisera.

How necessary it is for each one of us to prepare for service to the Lord through prayer and through the study of God's Word so when the proper time comes in our lives — and it will — we will be ready for the Lord to accomplish some purpose in the building of His Kingdom. That is why it so frequently happens that certain people are able to assume an important position in the Kingdom. Quietly they have prepared for a strong spiritual life through a faithful study of the Word and through prayer.

DEBORAH ENLISTS BARAK TO LEAD THE ARMY

JUDGES 4:6-9

At this point, we meet Barak and his reluctant obedience. Unlike Joan of Arc, Deborah did not put on the armor of a soldier herself and march at the head of the army. She went instead to a man by the name of Barak, whom the Lord had recommended to lead the army.

It is interesting to note what she tells him in essence: “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you to gather men at Mount Tabor...and I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the River Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give them into your hands.” She did not ask Barak if he wanted to do this but told him God had ordered him to do it. What is more, by now Barak and all others lived in terror of Sisera and his mighty troops. How could Barak lead the motley troops of Israel against such a great force? This remarkable woman, Deborah, who had the power of God guiding her, promised Barak she would accompany him.

Barak was reluctant to obey. It could well be he had problems with rendering obedience to a woman. A little chauvinism perhaps? He finally did agree to lead the armies, but only if Deborah would march at his side at all times. Her promise that God would be with them on the battlefield and assurance of victory seemingly meant nothing to Barak. Maybe Barak was looking for a scapegoat in case he failed on the battlefield. Perhaps he was filled with fear, positive he would fail because Israel did not have chariots or sufficient troops. That is why he agreed to lead the army only if Deborah accompanied him and why we speak of him as having reluctant obedience.

It was Barak’s attitude that compelled Deborah to predict the armies of Israel would indeed prevail but that the glory of victory would go to a woman. A woman would be the undoing of General Sisera. This is what reluctant obedience brings about. A small blessing is possible for such obedience, but the full measure of blessing is not there when

we do not obey the Lord with our whole heart, motivated by the love which He has for us.

Daily we need to remind ourselves what Jesus did for us to make possible inner peace and the knowledge all our sins are forgiven. In thankfulness, we reach out in love and show our faith by what we are able to do for others. What a joy all this is! What a comfort to know our God who has shown such great love is even now preparing heaven for us that we might be forever with Him! As we daily think of this, then the love which we experience from our Savior will become a revolutionary force in our lives. With that same joy, we will also want to speak to Him in prayer, to take our Bibles and read what God has prepared for us this day, so that He may speak to us and give us guidance. This is the kind of obedience the Lord seeks, not a reluctant one, but one that is gladly given out of love for Him.

THE BATTLE

JUDGES 4:10-16

So the battle took place. Barak was able to gather a force of ten thousand men. Then Deborah arose and went with Barak as he proceeded in the direction where he would meet the Canaanites. However, someone who should have been favorable to Israel proved to be a traitor. It was Heber, who was a descendant of the family into which Moses had married. He informed Sisera about the gathering of the Israelites. As a result, the general mustered his troops to stand in opposition to God’s people. Note particularly the 900 chariots of iron that were a terrifying threat to Israel.

Then came the majestic words of Deborah, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?” What trust this noble woman had! There was no holding back. God’s army was ready to march to victory for He fought for Israel, even as He always has sustained His people (Psalm 46).

With Deborah’s cry ringing in his ears, Barak went forth to battle. And — oh, observe it — “the Lord

unnerved Sisera.” Barak did not win the victory; the Lord won the victory. Utter confusion reigned in the forces of the Canaanites; there was no hope of victory. All those chariots and all those swords meant nothing when the Lord was fighting for Israel. Sisera soon realized the battle was lost and his forces were routed. Barak and his troops could pursue a defeated enemy and completely destroy what had seemed to be an invincible force.

SISERA’S DEATH

JUDGES 4:17–24

Finally, hopelessly defeated, Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot. He came to a tent in which dwelt the wife of Heber where he no doubt expected refuge because of what Heber had done before in reporting the gathering of the armies of Israel. This woman’s name was Jael. Sisera pleaded with her to take him into her tent, hide him, and not reveal his presence to anyone so he might escape with his life.

While Jael seemingly consented to this plea for safety, she had more loyalty for Israel than did her husband. When Sisera fell into an exhausted sleep, she killed him by driving a tent peg through his head. Considering that she was a lone woman with no weapons she did the best she could to rid Israel of this terrible enemy. The victory over Sisera belonged to a woman, even as Deborah had predicted (Judges 4:9). When Barak was brought into the tent, he found General Sisera dead at the hand of a woman.

The victory resulted in Israel regaining their freedom to live as God’s people and to prosper under His blessing. God continued to guide His people from whom eventually the greatest of all blessings would come into the world, the Messiah, the Savior of all mankind. God opened the way for His faithful children to get to heaven, where they might be able to live in His presence for all eternity.

DEBORAH’S SONG OF PRAISE

JUDGES 5:1–31

Deborah sings a song of praise to God that she had written with the collaboration of Barak to

commemorate the great victory God had won for her people over their enemies. She begins almost with a Hallelujah Chorus:

“Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;

to the LORD I will sing;

I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

You will want to read the entire song in Judges 5 that is typical of Hebrew poetry.

Deborah concluded her song with the words:

“So may all your enemies perish, O LORD!

But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might.”

The glory for the victory goes to God. Some time ago, we made a study of the Psalms of David and were surprised at the way David spoke of his enemies but at the same time expressed his complete confidence in God. We must realize these are people of great faith who are speaking and their faith is centered in God’s promises. Anything that would hinder the fulfillment of the promise of a Savior, such as the annihilation of Israel, was the direst threat possible. The enemies of God’s people must be destroyed for the promise of the Savior to come to pass. This should be helpful to us in understanding the attitude that God’s people had toward their enemies.

CONCLUSION

Deborah is an example of FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE!

Barak is an example of RELUCTANT OBEDIENCE!

By faith, we accept Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away all our sins. With His forgiveness, we enter into a new relationship where our whole purpose in life is to please God and His Son, our Savior, by the way we live. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Let ours be an obedience of love that comes from the heart because it finds its roots in Him who became obedient unto death, even death on the Cross.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

SAMUEL

Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you read 1 Samuel, Chapters 1 and 3. They will introduce you to Samuel.

Review

1. What was the main lesson you learned from the life of Deborah?

1 Samuel 1:1–2, 13, 17–18, 20–22, 26–28

2. Describe the family of which Samuel would be a part.

3. What was Hannah's great sorrow (verse 5)? Why would this especially be of concern for a Jewish woman?

4. What vow did Hannah make to the Lord (verse 11)? Can you discover the meaning of the name Hannah gave her son?

5. What words of Hannah could be the prayer of every mother?

1 Samuel 2:11–12, 18–26

6. How did Hannah continue to show her motherly love to Samuel?

7. What reward did God give to Hannah because of her faithfulness to Him?

8. How does Eli remind us of modern parents? Contrast how Eli dealt with his sons with the advice given us in Proverbs 29:17.

1 Samuel 3:1–21

9. In your own words, describe the incident with which this chapter begins.

10. How could we apply the words of Samuel in verse 10 to ourselves?

11. How would you describe the relationship of Samuel to Eli? How would you describe the relationship of Eli to Samuel?

12. Why do the words of Eli in verse 18 fill us with admiration for the man?

13. Describe the development of Samuel's spiritual life.

1 Samuel 4:1–5, 10–11, 12–18

14. Try to understand the historical facts here:

Who were the enemies? _____

In their victory what horrible thing happened? _____

What happened to the sons of Eli? _____

What happened to Eli? _____

What do we learn from this concerning everything God says? (2 Tim. 2:13)

1 Samuel 7:3–11, 15–17, 8:1–10

15. There are many interesting incidents in these verses. List some of them.

The attitude of the people toward the Lord. _____

The promise Samuel is able to make to them. _____

The call for a gathering. Its purpose. _____

What happened to the Philistines? _____

The people's request. _____

1 Samuel 9:17, 27, 10:1

16. Describe Saul's anointing by Samuel.

1 Samuel 16:1, 13, 25:1

17. What in Samuel's life would you like to incorporate into your life?



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We cannot run away from the world; we have to live and work in the world in whatever capacity God chooses for us, just as Samuel did in his day.

SAMUEL – SUPREME DEDICATION

A tiny stream seemed to be lost as it wandered aimlessly down the side of the hill. Then one day a stranger passed that way and dug a hole into which this little stream could flow. He hung a tin cup in case anyone should pass that way and need a drink. The result was that many people were refreshed from that little stream.

This story has something to say to us about dedication. We often wonder whether the little things we do for others really amount to anything. But aren't these little things — cutting the sick neighbor's lawn, helping a friend with a chore that has to be done, writing an encouraging note — saying to other people that our religion is really a matter of the heart. This is what we mean by dedication. As we realize each day all that God does for us, we want to show how grateful we are, not only by the words we speak, but by sharing our love with others. We are reminded of this as we look at the life of the prophet Samuel and learn from him, for he was a truly dedicated man, consecrated to the Lord.

THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

There was a man by the name of Elkanah, who had two wives. One of the wives had children but the other wife, Hannah, had no children. For a Jewish woman this was a special burden because according to their culture, she was not fulfilling her function as a wife if she did not produce children for her husband. There was also the spiritual implication, for every Jewish woman hoped the child born to her would be the promised Messiah. In Hannah's case, there was painful ridicule from Elkanah's other wife.

She went with her husband to the Jewish tabernacle on his annual pilgrimage. With great fervency, she prayed to God and asked Him to give her a son with the promise to give this child back to the Lord. In her prayer, we recognize the act of a noble child of God. The Lord heard her prayer and again a miracle birth took place and a new leader for God's people was born. Hannah gave her son the name Samuel, which means, "God has heard."

How she loved that boy and from his character, we can see the loving influence of his mother. We also feel certain part of caring for her son was the spiritual instruction she gave him, for Samuel became a spiritual giant. Hannah kept the child with her until he could be weaned which, in the case of Jewish mothers, was longer than it is with present day mothers. By that time, Samuel was at the age of a pre-school child and was ready to begin his training as a servant of the Lord.

Hannah took this little boy many miles from her home to the House of the Lord, the tabernacle at Shiloh, and left him with Eli the high priest. Eli would teach her boy in the ways of the Lord. How this boy learned to love the Lord!

Time flies, which is particularly true as we grow older, but time is also passing for our children and grandchildren. There must be no delay in their spiritual training. We cannot wait — for then it may be too late! If we love our children, then surely we must see they are in church regularly. We don't have to give them up to be away from home as Hannah did, for God gives us the privilege of keeping them with us during these interesting years with the understanding we will give them the spiritual guidance they need. God has placed these children in our care and given us the church to assist us.

THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF SAMUEL

1 SAMUEL 2:12 – 3:21

Do you suppose little Samuel minded being away from his loving mother? Of course he did. He loved her. He knew how good she had been to him. But Samuel also loved the Lord and he was eager to learn about the Lord. Part of his training was to render special service at the tabernacle (1 Sam. 2:11).

However, this environment for Samuel was not the best, even in the tabernacle, for Eli had sons who were not observing the ways of the Lord. The Lord may even have used this to strengthen Samuel's character. From the little we learn of Eli, we conclude he was a dedicated priest before the Lord. He took delight in Samuel and had a great influence upon him. Behind the scenes still hovered Samuel's God-fearing mother, who showed her devotion to him by providing a new coat for her son each year as he grew.

An example of the spiritual development of Samuel is an incident where the Lord called to Samuel in the night and he went at once to Eli. After the third occurrence, the high priest realized what was happening. He told Samuel if he hears this call again to say, "Speak Lord, for your servant hears." Obviously, this is a prayer that we would do well to speak as we enter church, for through our pastors and teachers, God is speaking to us and teaching us to know the things that are important for us.

The message the Lord gave to Samuel on this occasion was very unpleasant. The Lord was going to deal with Eli and his sons. Samuel feared to tell Eli but, having confidence in Eli, he finally does reveal what the Lord told him. The attitude Eli displays again shows Samuel a wonderful lesson. Eli does not turn away from the Lord but humbly submits to His will (1 Sam. 3:18).

Samuel lived before the time of Jesus but like all the great people of the Old Testament, Samuel was taught to look forward to the coming of the Messiah. How fortunate we are to be able to explain to our children exactly what Jesus did for us as our Savior. Parents need to use every opportunity to learn more about Jesus so they can share this knowledge with their children. Surely, our highest desire is that like Samuel, they will dedicate themselves to the Lord.

SAMUEL ASSUMES LEADERSHIP OF HIS PEOPLE

1 SAMUEL 4-7

The Word of the Lord is always fulfilled and it was also for Eli and his family, as well as for the children of Israel, who had forgotten the lesson they should have learned about disobedience to the Lord. Now began the terrible harassment from the Philistines under which the Israelites lived for many years.

By this time Samuel had grown and matured to the point where he could begin to guide Israel (1 Sam. 3:19–20). The Lord was with Samuel. All knew it. This was because Samuel did not neglect anything God had said in His Word. In addition, all Israel recognized God had prepared Samuel to be His prophet. Through Samuel, it was apparent the Lord was with His people.

Because of the terror spread by the Philistines, Samuel urged his people to oppose them. A battle ensued in which Israel was defeated. It had become customary through the years for them to carry the ark of the covenant with them into battle. It was symbolic to them that the Lord was with them. However, in this battle the Philistines succeeded in capturing the ark, which indicated to the Israelites their God had forsaken them. Israel was routed and both of Eli's sons died in the conflict.

One man escaped from the battle and ran back to Shiloh to tell what had happened. Eli was sitting in front of the tabernacle when the messenger arrived. He heard about the defeat and the death of his sons, but when he heard the ark of the covenant had been taken, he was so shocked that he fell over backwards, broke his neck and died. From that time on, Israel looked to Samuel for leadership.

SAMUEL BECOMES PROPHET AND JUDGE

1 SAMUEL 7

It is not surprising when the Lord needed a prophet to lead His people and to be His spokesman, He chose Samuel. What a wonderful prophet he became as he spoke to the people about God and urged them to faithfully serve the Lord. God had given Samuel the will to do His work.

Samuel was effective in his ministry, for when the people lamented, he could assure them that if they turned their hearts again to the Lord, the Lord would rescue them from their enemies (1 Sam. 7:2–3). Samuel arranged for the gathering of the people, at which time they confessed their sins to the Lord and asked Samuel to continue intercession for them. Then the Lord rescued them from the Philistines in a miraculous way (1 Sam. 7:10). This caused Samuel to set up a stone of remembrance he called Ebenezer, meaning, "Till now the LORD has helped us" (1 Sam. 7:12).

Thinking of Samuel, we are reminded of a hymn that means much to us:

*"Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee."*

We need to be filled with thoughtful concern when we think of that hymn. Do we sing the first phrase but really imply, "After that, please do not disturb. Please, let me be?" If you are willing to place your life completely into the hands of your loving Father, then you ought to be willing to serve Him. God wants to use you for some worthwhile purpose and, as a dedicated child, you surely want to render service to Him. Being grateful for all God has done for you, seek to do things for others, serve in the church, your community and be willing to serve Him in any way He indicates to you.

Samuel did not become a prophet of God at an easy time. It is true, that under Joshua, the Lord had defeated all the enemies and had given the land to Israel — but do you think these enemies took all that sitting down? No! At every chance available, they struck back at the Israelites. Did that stop Samuel from being a faithful prophet? Of course not! It only seemed to spur him on to be even more dedicated in service to the Lord.

None of us likes everything that's going on in the world today. We would love to find some quiet place where we would not have to hear about all the bad news! We would like to let the people who are doing so many violent, godless things go their own way and let us be completely away from it all. But then we would not be where God wants us to be (John 17:15). God intends for us to be in the world but not of the world. He wants us to be a light in the world (Matt. 5:14–16), to light the way for others to follow so they too may know Jesus. We cannot run away from the world; we have to live and work in the world in whatever capacity God chooses for us, just as Samuel did in his day.

SAMUEL BECOMES A KING MAKER

1 SAMUEL 8–9

In Chapter 8, Samuel dealt with a crisis in his life that often comes to the faithful children of God. We have faithfully done the work we believed God wanted us to do, but people do not appreciate it. We sense they are pushing us aside. As a result, we naturally feel let down, and who can blame us?

So it was with Samuel. He had faithfully served these people as God's prophet for many years, given them spiritual guidance and directed them so they were able to overcome their enemies. As a result, the Lord had richly blessed these people and cared for them. A good job, we would say. Now these people come to Samuel and tell him they want a king like all the other nations around them. They might as well have said, "We are not satisfied with you as a prophet anymore and we are not pleased with what God has done for us either."

What would we have done under these circumstances? Would we have pouted and said, "If that's the way you feel, then don't look to me for any further help for you won't get it"? Is that what Samuel, the man of God, did? No! He turned to the Lord and asked for direction. The Lord gave him an answer (1 Sam. 8:6–7). He told Samuel the people had really not rejected him but they had rejected the Lord. The Lord then told Samuel to grant the wish of the people and directed him how to proceed in selecting their king.

The real character of Samuel appears when we are told that he called the people together and told them all the Lord had said (1 Sam. 8:10). This showed a deep loving concern for these people. What SUPREME DEDICATION Samuel demonstrated. Here was God's prophet in his sublime faithfulness still ministering to these people who had so deeply disappointed him.

Now, we're told how Samuel became acquainted with Saul, the son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin, whom God had chosen to be the first king of Israel (1 Sam. 9:17). The following chapters tell us how Samuel served the new king and how he was God's spokesman to the king, telling him constantly what the Lord expected of the king of Israel. We also know of the great disappointment Samuel had in this king when he disobeyed the Lord. This takes us into the life of Saul.

In the end, Samuel had yet the joyful experience of anointing the second king of Israel, David, the shepherd from Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16). It was during the struggle between Saul and David when the course of Samuel's life ran out. He was probably a very disappointed man because of the condition in his own country, knowing these were God's people but not acting like the chosen people of God. The death of Samuel is recorded in 1 Sam. 25:1. The esteem the people had for him was very great for he had been a faithful prophet, an example of SUPREME DEDICATION.

CONCLUSION

The application to our own lives is very apparent.

- We need to evaluate what God has done for us and look at our lives to determine what kind of response we have demonstrated to the Lord.
- Next, we should look for doors of service the Lord has opened for us. Most likely, we will find new areas in which we can serve the Lord.
- Let us then throw ourselves into His service with all our energy in this critical time as the end draws near.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

SAUL

Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you study the sections from 1 Samuel regarding the first king of Israel and answer the questions.

1. From your notes, list Samuel's most admirable characteristic and the two people who had the greatest influence upon his life.

2. Read 1 Samuel, Chapter 9. Describe the appearance of Saul in verse 2. (You might use other translations)

In verse 6, we again hear about Samuel. How is he described?

What words of Saul in 9:21 indicate he was an unlikely choice to be a king?

3. How is the anointing of a king described in 10:1?

4. What phrases in 1 Samuel 10 give us additional characteristics of Saul that indicate he had the potential for being a good king?

State the response of the people to their new king.

What instructions had Samuel given to Saul in 10:8?

5. What unexpected quality in Saul appears in 11:6–8 and in 11:12–13?

6. How did Samuel inspire Saul to be a leader for his people? (12:7)

7. Read Chapter 13. Why did the people at this time need a strong leader?

What did Saul do to show the weakness that would eventually be his undoing? (13:8–9)

What did Samuel indicate would be the consequences of his weakness? (13:14)

8. Chapter 14 also gives us insight into the person of Saul. It begins by telling of the great victory Saul's son, Jonathan, gained over the Philistines. How did the Lord show it was His victory? (1 Samuel 14:14–15)

9. What order had Saul given to his soldiers? (14:24)

Who disobeyed and why?

What was the outcome of this episode? (14:45)

10. Read Chapter 15 that shows us how the weakness of Saul became his undoing. Explain.

11. In Chapter 16, David is anointed as Saul's successor and a beautiful relationship develops between Saul's son, Jonathan, and David. Read 17:17–58 and tell what happened.

12. What effect did the song of the women (18:7–9) have on Saul?

13. From this time on, Saul's whole endeavor seemed to center around the need to destroy David. Describe the relationship between them and the reason for it. (18:12–16, 20–30)

14. How does this agree with what the Lord said to Cain in Genesis 4:7?

We will skip the entire section that deals with Saul's persecution of David.

In Chapter 28, we approach the end of Saul's life. Describe:

15. Saul's relationship with God (verse 6).

To whom did Saul turn?

What was the request Saul made?

What was the message?

What practice does this remind us of today?

16. Chapter 31 brings us to the end of Saul's life. With what two tragic occurrences does this chapter begin?

17. Looking at the life of King Saul, what important lesson do you learn?

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We must remember it is not the outward acts that count with God but the dedication in our hearts. Saul lacked that inner dedication.



SAUL – GOOD BEGINNING — BAD ENDING

It is so much easier to explain the Ten Commandments than it is to live them. Our Christian vocation is not a course to study but a course to run. In the same way, it is easier to thoughtlessly kneel before an altar, to make the sign of the cross and to repeat the words of an ancient liturgy, than it is to worship our God in spirit and in truth. God looks at the heart.

The ancient prophet Micah was painfully aware of how easy it is for us to go through the mere formality of religion while our hearts may be far from the Lord. He wrote,

“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:6–8)

Thank God, we have a Savior, our dear Lord Jesus, who kept every one of those commandments for us and observed every detail of the ceremonial law in our place. By His bitter suffering and shameful death, He has paid for every one of our many transgressions. Only by faith in Him will we be able to walk closer in the way God desires of us.

We are going to study about the life of King Saul. We cannot possibly look at all that is written about the first king of Israel. As we look at Saul's life, we will see a promising beginning when first he became king; then the tragic end of his life that was a great disappointment to the Lord, to the prophet Samuel, and to his own people. The main thought is A GOOD BEGINNING DOES NOT ASSURE A GOOD ENDING.

Such disappointments in life frequently result from wasted lives. People make a good beginning, but something happens along the way and they gradually lose interest and finally end up a complete wreck. Parents often experience such disappointments in their children; pastors in their people; employers in employees they have groomed for certain positions. By examining the life of King Saul, we may be able to find the answer with the hope we will not be a disappointment and will also be able to help others avoid a tragic end.

SAUL IS CHOSEN THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL

1 SAMUEL 9-10

The children of Israel came to Samuel and requested he ask the Lord to give them a king like all the other nations. Against His own desire, the Lord agreed to do this. God then directed the choice of that king to be Saul, the son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin. The Lord saw in Saul the potential to become a great king. Surely, the people too were convinced he was just the kind of king they wanted when they saw him for the first time, "tall, dark and handsome."

God arranged for Samuel to become acquainted with Saul in a rather unusual way, which would certainly not blind his eyes to the kind of man Saul was. Samuel met Saul while he was looking for lost horses and wearing his work clothes. When the Lord indicated to Samuel that Saul was the one he had chosen as king, Samuel then anointed him to this office. This anointing was a symbolic act by which the Lord conveyed His power upon those who would lead His people in spiritual and secular matters. An ox horn was filled with olive

oil which would then be poured over the head of the anointed one (1 Sam. 10:1).

Using this symbolic act, the Bible indicates Jesus was the designate of God for the highest of all offices, that of Savior of the world. Jewish people understood this very well, which is why they kept insisting that Jesus claimed to be a king, but they did not want Him as their king. Examine: John 1:41; Acts 4:27; Acts 10:38. The meaning of the Greek word "Christ" and the Hebrew word "Messiah" is "the Anointed One."

Samuel was able to give Saul a wonderful promise (1 Sam. 10:6). The Spirit of the Lord was going to come upon him and this would make an entirely different person of him. In 1 Sam. 10:9, we are told that God gave Saul another heart, and so, humanly speaking, there was every reason to believe Saul would be a good king.

While God had made the choice, He still wanted the people to feel that Saul was their choice as well, so He had Samuel arrange for a public selection of a king. Of course, this selection came out the same way — Saul was chosen. But when it came time for their new king to be introduced to them, he could not be found for he had hidden himself. Again, at this point we admire Saul, and once more are filled with anticipation of him, as his humility was of such noble character.

When the people finally saw this fine young man, a head taller than any of them, they were ecstatic about their first king. "Long live the king!" they shouted. But it still took a while for all the people to accept Saul; it finally came about when the land was once again threatened by their age-old enemies, the Ammonites. It was then they knew they had to unite to overcome these foes.

Once Saul had assumed the office of king, there is no indication in the Bible that he ever called upon the Lord for guidance, as King David would do later. This is already an indication Saul would fail as a king. What a lesson for us! With God, we can accomplish many things; without Him, we shall surely fail (Rom. 8:31, 37).

SAUL LEADS HIS PEOPLE AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES

1 SAMUEL 11–15

Saul at once had to deal with the Ammonites, who were harrying certain areas of the kingdom. We are told, “The Spirit of God came upon him [Saul]” (1 Sam. 11:6 NIV). As a result, guided by the Lord, he was determined to defend his people. He called for an army and had a tremendous response of those who wanted to fight with him. As a result, they crushed the Ammonites and all the people united behind their king.

But this good beginning did not last long. A year after Saul became king he already showed his weakness. The Philistines, who were to be the enemies of Israel throughout the reign of Saul, were beginning to stir. Saul knew he was going to have to deal with them. However, he found his people terrified of these mighty enemies, so he felt he needed the assurance of God’s blessings in his efforts (1 Sam. 13). So Saul called for sacrifices to be made to the Lord at Gilgal.

Samuel had earlier told Saul he should indeed go to Gilgal for in seven days he would meet him there and make sacrifice to the Lord (1 Sam. 10:8). When Saul arrived in Gilgal, Samuel was not there. Saul proceeded to make the sacrifice to the Lord by himself instead of waiting for Samuel, whom the Lord had designated for such service to Him. This displeased the Lord greatly and He indicated to Saul the kingship would not continue with his family (1 Sam. 13:13–14).

We must remember it is not the outward acts that count with God but the dedication in our hearts. Saul lacked that inner dedication. We can be assured of the Lord’s blessing when we do what He wants us to do and when we do not neglect those important things that He requires of us. Jesus put it to us very plainly when He said: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28). Yet, how many people never choose to hear the Word of God and then wonder why the Lord does not bless them? By their own disobedience, they close the door to God’s blessings.

Saul’s son Jonathan attacked the Philistines, and, with the miraculous aid of the Lord, defeated them (1 Sam. 14). Saul had placed upon his people the injunction against food until evening of that day. Jonathan, however, was unaware of this injunction and ate some honey. When this was reported to Saul, he determined Jonathan would have to die for his disobedience. The people pleaded for the life of Jonathan and he was spared (1 Sam. 14:45).

In the meantime, Saul had to deal with yet another enemy nation, the Amalekites. In this case, the Lord ordered Saul to completely destroy these people and all they possessed. The Amalekites, with their ungodly behavior, were a temptation to the chosen people of God. Through God’s people, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, was promised and God did not want them to be influenced by this evil nation.

Saul understood exactly God’s order was total destruction of the Amalekites. But Saul did not obey the Lord. He spared the life of the king and others, as well as some of the better spoils, including some of the good cattle (1 Sam. 15:9).

This disobedience displeased the Lord. As a result, Samuel was sent to Saul to inform him that his reign as king was gone. Saul would no longer be effective as a ruler of his people (1 Sam. 15:28). Saul knew very well what he had done and he seemingly repented of his sin and turned to the Lord (1 Sam. 15:25, 31). It had been made clear to Saul his successor would not be one of his sons. From this time on, Saul did not enjoy the blessing of the Lord and his people suffered because of it.

What a lesson that is for us! We surely cannot willfully disobey the Lord and expect Him to continue to bless us. Having the blessing of the Lord is important to us. When we, through our willful disobedience, bring consequences upon ourselves, it invariably touches all who are around us. Our selfishness produces a curse on others. Think of what Saul’s disobedience did to his family, particularly to Jonathan, who was such a noble young man.

SAUL AND DAVID

1 SAMUEL 16–30

The latter years of Saul's life were characterized in this way, "Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him" (1 Sam. 16:14). In the meantime, God had already designated Saul's successor and He sent Samuel to anoint the shepherd lad, David, of "Bethlehem," to be king. Because of the evil spirit, Saul felt he might be soothed by hearing sweet music and, no doubt by the Lord's direction, David was found to play the harp for him. Thus, God brought David into the palace, where he was able to observe the responsibilities of being a king.

At first there was a fine relationship between Saul and David, for Saul did not know David would succeed him as king (1 Sam. 16:21). But then came the incident of David and Goliath, by which David became a national hero (1 Sam. 18:7). From that time on, Saul turned against David. The evil spirit that possessed Saul gave him a mental illness so that he had no rest. He even attempted to kill David while David was playing the harp for him (1 Sam. 18:9, 11).

Saul attempted to gain control over David by trickery, offering him his daughter in marriage. Saul hoped to gain closer access to David in order to destroy him. The passion of Saul from this time on was to kill David. We will be speaking of this as we look into the lives of David and Jonathan. David's relationship toward Saul was one of kind consideration (1 Samuel 18:17–18).

Between Saul and David, we see a vivid contrast between a person whose life is placed into the hands of God and a person who has been cut off from God. In Saul's case, it appears he was controlled by an accusing conscience resulting from a broken relationship with God, which led to greed and selfishness, distrust and hatred.

Saul's is a sad story. A promising life became a real disappointment. Saul had everything going for him but he threw it all away because he would not dedicate himself to the Lord. There is no way we can blame God for what happened to Saul. God had endowed Saul with what he needed to be a successful king and was there

at all times to help and guide him. But Saul, himself, became a barrier to God's blessings.

We would do well to ask ourselves if we have any attitudes that might cause our undoing. If so, are we willing to do something about them? Are we ready to humble ourselves before God, acknowledge our weaknesses and ask His forgiveness? We can then seek His help to overcome and triumph by His power through the faith that He gives. It might be well for us in this connection to read what Paul has to say in 1 Corinthians 1:17–31.

THE END OF SAUL'S LIFE

1 SAMUEL 31

During the rest of his life, Saul was constantly under pressure due to the hated Philistines as, once again, these enemies threatened. Samuel was dead and Saul could not turn to God for guidance because he had severed that relationship. In desperation, Saul disguises himself and turns to a fortune teller known as the witch of Endor. We know that an evil spirit is working in Saul and the devil is ruling his heart. The incident with the witch is purely devil-inspired for it left Saul with no hope, which is exactly what the devil desires (1 Peter 5:8). The witch manages to summon Samuel back from the dead (or an evil spirit which takes Samuel's form). The message "Samuel" gives Saul is one of doom.

The message comes true. The battle with the Philistines takes place and Israel is crushed in defeat. All three sons of Saul are slain, including the God-fearing Jonathan. When Saul realizes what has happened, he asks his armor-bearer to kill him. The armor-bearer refuses, so Saul commits suicide (1 Sam. 31:4). Thus ends the life that had such a promising beginning. GOOD BEGINNING — BAD ENDING!

CONCLUSION

May the Lord help us become strong; may He give us the faith to trust Him wholly; may He fill our hearts with such love for Him we will gladly do whatever He asks of us. If our life is guided by these principles, we can be assured that the blessing of the Lord will rest upon us and our life will be victorious.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

DAVID

Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you in your understanding for you will need to examine a number of passages.

Review

1. What did you discover was the cause of Saul’s downfall? What effect did his disobedience have upon his family?

Read 1 Samuel 16

2. It is important you have a detailed picture of David:

Name David’s father. _____

Give his ancestry (Ruth 4:17). _____

Describe his family. _____

What was his boyhood occupation? _____

Describe his physical appearance. _____

What musical ability did he have? _____

What note appears above several Psalms? _____

What kind of courage did he display according to 1 Sam. 17:34–35?

3. Describe David’s first encounter with King Saul (1 Sam. 16:21–23). Why would this be important to David for his destiny in life?

4. The incident with Goliath deserves our attention. Read 1 Samuel 17.

Who was Goliath? _____

Why was David offended by Goliath? _____

Where did David get his courage? _____

How did Saul want to arm him? _____

How did David arm himself? _____

Describe what happened. _____

What was the reaction of the people? (1 Samuel 18:21)

What was Saul's reaction?

What are your thoughts regarding this encounter?

5. Describe the relationship of Saul's son Jonathan with David. (1 Sam. 18:1–5)
6. It appears Jonathan knew David would be the next king. What vow did Jonathan and David make to each other in 1 Sam. 20:1–15?
7. How did Jonathan communicate to David the hopelessness of his situation in the court of Saul? (1 Sam. 20:20–23, 20:35–38)
8. Describe how desperate David actually became in his flight. (1 Sam. 21:1–6)
9. In what connection did Jesus use this incident many years later? (Matt. 12:1–4)
10. The next period of David's life finds him fleeing constantly from Saul while he is building up quite a following for himself. Describe David's noble act in Chapter 24.
11. By this time, what had Saul begun to realize? (1 Sam. 24:20–25)
12. One more incident needs attention. Chapter 25 introduces us to Abigail. She was a very intelligent and beautiful woman married to a surly man. Describe how it came about that David married her.
13. List as many reasons as you can for David's development as a strong leader.
14. How do you think you would have responded to similar situations in your own life?
15. Read Psalm 26 - Repeat two thoughts David conveys.
16. What is your favorite of David's psalms and why is it special to you?



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KING DAVID – TRIALS & TRIUMPHS

How better to introduce our study but through the words of the Bible, 1 Samuel 16:11–12:

“Then Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all your sons here?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.’ And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.’ And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the LORD said, ‘Arise, anoint him, for this is he.’”

After the battle lines of the Protestant Reformation were clearly drawn, the life of Martin Luther was in serious danger on many occasions. When the heat of the conflict was at fever pitch, a dignitary of the church sought to frighten Luther. He pointed to the overwhelming power of both church and state arrayed against the lonely monk. “Unless you can muster a force of equal strength in your defense,” he said, “where will you be?” Martin Luther replied undaunted, “I shall be where I have always been, in the hands of almighty God.” This complete trust in God became the source of his great courage.

How does this apply to us? Do we begin each day with the conviction our lives are in the hand of almighty God, whom we can trust implicitly? Do we, as a result, have the courage to do the things we know the Lord expects of us? This is an area in which we all need to grow. With this in mind, we look at the early years of King David, for we see in him the TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF YOUTH.

DAVID'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Perhaps you are familiar with the gigantic statues of David in parks and museums around the world. David was a mighty man but he was mighty because of his relationship with God, which statues cannot depict. His relationship with God was almost like a human friendship. God was truly pleased with David from the beginning, even in his youth. God was not always pleased with him because of what he did but because of what was in his heart (1 Sam. 16:7). When David became a mighty king, he remained a humble child of God and put his complete trust in the Lord.

We must be conscious of our personal worth. We were made by the almighty creative hand of God to be just the persons we are because God has a special purpose for each one of us. We also must remember God paid an enormous price to make us His children. The blood of His Son was the substitutionary sacrifice for our individual lives. Only as we realize our own personal worth is it possible for us to achieve His purpose for our lives. As we grow in our spiritual life, we dare never forget we can accomplish nothing without the Lord's help.

DAVID'S CHILDHOOD

David was the youngest of eight sons. His father, Jesse, was the son of Obed and grandson of Ruth, the Moabitess. It is very common for the youngest of that many sons to be spoiled, pampered and teased. Jesse, as a good father, did not allow that to happen. Together with the other boys, David received his assignment of work, and his was not a small assignment. He was made responsible as a shepherd to care for the

vast flock of sheep owned by the family. This meant he had to live openly in nature.

He received useful physical training and, as it turned out, also grew spiritually. David was not soft and pampered but one who could rough it in the outdoors, which would be helpful to him in the years to come. To care for his sheep meant he also had to sleep with them at night because they needed constant protection. David was courageous to give such protection for his flocks, for he killed both a lion and a bear who tried to molest his sheep (1 Sam. 17:34–35).

Being alone with his sheep had great spiritual value for David. It gave him a chance to think and meditate. As he was out in nature, he thought often of God and the conviction of his wonderful God took root in his heart and grew. He wrote of this in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."

During this period of his life originated many of the thoughts that he later used in his psalms. Perhaps during this time he wrote Psalm 23, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." Surely, during this period he came up with the calming idea of Psalm 121: "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth."

David's many marvelous psalms have been used by God's people for centuries to worship the Lord. They are considered among the greatest literature of all time. During this time, David had the opportunity to develop some of his other talents. Sitting there, watching his sheep, he had time to practice on his harp and this ability later played an important role in his life.

We must remember we contribute a great deal to the thinking of the young. Many have never lacked for anything as those who went through the Great Depression. We probably make it too easy for them and do not give them sufficient responsibilities while they are growing up. In how many homes are children given chores to do? Dishwashers and automatic dryers limit the range of home tasks. Sometimes parents aren't at home to do the training. This is really sad because when the children leave home, we expect them to cope, and we are disappointed when they can't.

DAVID IN THE COURT OF KING SAUL

God was preparing this young man for a big task. He was to become the king of God's people so God gave him many opportunities for development. One of these came when he was summoned into the court of King Saul (1 Sam. 16:8–22). He was called specifically to play the harp when the evil spirit was molesting Saul but, at the same time, he was an observer of all that went on in the king's court. In this way, he learned to know what would be expected of him when he became king. Surely, during this time, he had opportunity for meditation.

As we analyze our own lives, we find it is amazing how the Lord has directed matters so we became interested in things we normally would never have thought about. Through opportunities the Lord provided, we were prepared and launched on a path that we probably would not have chosen for ourselves.

DAVID AND GOLIATH

1 SAMUEL 17

One event that contributed to the development of David was his battle with the giant Goliath. This story is well known. He slew this mighty giant with the stone from a slingshot. Think of what this did in strengthening his courage to face the enemies of God, knowing the Lord was with him. How beautifully he expressed this reliance

on the Lord in Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." His faith in God was important for his leadership as king of Israel.

Peter has some wonderful things to say in 1 Peter 1:3–7. He speaks about how, amid life's trials, we realize that God has given us a glorious hope by raising Jesus from the dead. As a result, we have the prospect of an inheritance, for the Lord Himself will keep us in our faith. Nevertheless, while we rejoice in our future heritage, we still have to go through periods of testing. These tests merely refine our faith so finally we join with those who praise and glorify God. David learned this in the trials of his youth.

The aftermath of David's battle with Goliath made him a national hero. Saul in his insecurity felt the Lord had forsaken him, and he was filled with envy (1 Sam. 18:7–9). He tried to kill David, for he saw in David a threat to his power as king and felt the Lord was blessing David. All the while David's behavior is beautifully described, "And David had success in all his undertakings, for the LORD was with him" (1 Sam. 18:10–14).

DAVID AND JONATHAN

Though Saul's attitude must have disturbed David, he was cheered by the understanding and compassion of Saul's oldest son Jonathan, the expected heir to the throne. Like Saul, Jonathan sensed David had been chosen to be king. He developed a friendship with David that's described in 1 Sam. 18:1–4. This friendship lasted throughout the lives of these two men and was important in David's development, for it taught him the value of loyalty and faithfulness.

Later in this series, we will have a study on Jonathan. Jonathan was a great help to David for he always supported David when his father, Saul, would allow his evil passions to display themselves. In 1 Samuel 20, we have a poignant

example of that great friendship. David was a very confused young man at this time. He felt his place was with Saul and yet he feared for his life. He and Jonathan agreed a definite decision had to be made. Jonathan would determine if David should return to serve Saul. Since Saul, in a fit of anger, had also tried to kill Jonathan himself, this young man also had to be most careful.

By a previously arranged plan, David was to hide in a field near the king's home. Jonathan would come out with his servant and shoot an arrow. He would then, in a loud voice, instruct his servant where the arrow had landed. By an agreed code, David would know whether he could safely return to the king or if he needed to flee. With this method, Jonathan indicated to David it was no longer safe for him to remain, thus resulting in the beginning of a new phase in David's training.

DAVID AND MICHAL

1 SAMUEL 18:20-30

While David was in the court of King Saul, he became acquainted with Michal, the king's daughter, and fell in love with her. When they went to Saul and asked for permission to marry, the king gave his permission freely. It was not because Saul liked David but he thought that through Michal he might be able to harm David. Michal, however, in her love for David would not allow herself to be used and helped David to escape (1 Sam. 19:10-18).

This begins a lengthy separation, which is never healthy for a marriage and it was not for this one either. Saul later forced Michal to marry another (1 Sam. 25:44). Afterward David demanded Michal be returned to him as his wife (2 Sam. 3:14-16), but the love between the two had chilled. Michal had changed and there was a definite clash of personalities.

DAVID IN EXILE

A large part of David's training was the result of the persistent persecution by King Saul. David had done only good for the king but was repaid in the most shameful way, as Saul sought to kill him. It was a hard school for David but a necessary one. The years that should have been very productive for him were spent fleeing from one place to another, living in caves and barely existing.

We will not be following David during this time of exile but you can read about it in 1 Sam. 21-30. Through this experience, David learned some important lessons:

- He discovered the value of loyalty to those who served him.
- He learned how to lead people and get them to respond.
- He learned when to be forceful and when to be charitable with people.

It is true all of us learn through the hardships of life and discover the things that have value. We should not deplore difficulties that arise but should use them to become more and more the kind of people God wants us to be.

During this time of exile, David was able to gather a corps of faithful followers, who later were very helpful to him when he became king. By his leadership and unswerving loyalty to these people, David learned what would be necessary if he was to lead God's people wisely.

What an important lesson for us! If we want to have loyal friends, we ourselves must be honest, faithful and loyal to them. We cannot expect others to give what we ourselves are not ready to give. Friendship is a two-way street. No one is strong enough to do the task before him without loyal friends.

*In David, we see the TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS of youth.
David was God's choice for a big task, far bigger than he realized.
In serving as king of Israel and establishing Israel as a powerful
nation, David was making possible God's greater purpose.*



DAVID AND ABIGAIL

1 SAMUEL 25

Toward the end of his exile, David was in a crisis. He learned of a very rich man, Nabal, and sent some of his servants to ask this man for help. Nabal was surly and refused to give any help. His wife, Abigail, however, realized this was a mistake because she knew of the mighty force David led. When she heard how her husband had treated the servants, she herself went to bring supplies to David and his people and pleaded with David to not harm her husband.

Then Nabal died suddenly. The Bible says: "And about ten days later the LORD struck Nabal, and he died" (1 Sam. 25:8). David arranged to take Abigail as his wife. She was a strong woman and was very helpful to David at this time. Remember, David was free to marry her since his marriage with Michal had been severed.

David eventually had many wives. He was a God-fearing man, but with regard to marriage, he did not heed the counsel of the Lord. As a result, he brought grief upon himself. The great difficulties that developed in his home with his many wives and children are an indication that the Lord does not desire that kind of marriage relationship. God's plan from the beginning was one husband and one wife (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5). God has placed into mankind the instinct of jealousy and this certainly comes to the fore when more than two people are involved in a marriage.

CONCLUSION

In David, we see the TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS of youth. David was God's choice for a big task, far bigger than he realized. In serving as king of Israel and establishing Israel as a powerful nation, David was making possible God's greater purpose. This proved to be the eventual salvation offered to the whole world, for a descendant of David would be the Messiah, the Christ.

The Christmas story shows us Jesus was a descendant of David. Let us rejoice in the goodness of God as we see it in action in the life of this ruddy young shepherd lad who was being prepared to become the king of Israel. Let us also rejoice in what the Lord has done in our lives to make us His children and heirs of His heavenly kingdom.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

DAVID

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart in understanding the following passages from 2 Samuel.

Review

1. From the notes, mention some events that happened in David's life which show the close relationship he had with God.

2. Why do you think the Lord led this young man through such great difficulties?

2 Samuel, Chapter 1

3. How did the man who reported Saul's death think David would react? How did David react?

4. Whose death particularly did David mourn? Why?

5. What indication do we have David's reign would not be peaceful from the very beginning? (2 Sam. 2:8–11)

6. Abner was the captain of Saul's army and Joab of David's. What would their natural desire be as far as the kingship was concerned?

What proposition does Abner make to David? (2 Sam. 3:12)

Because Joab did not trust Abner, what did he do? (2 Sam. 3:30)

7. What was the real weakness in David's character? (2 Sam. 5:13 ff.)

8. Read 2 Sam. 6:1–12, 17–18. This tells us of the ark of the covenant, the same ark Moses prepared in the wilderness. To Israel, it represented the presence of God. What thought comes to you as you read these verses?

9. David's relationship with God is so beautifully shown in 2 Sam. 7.

What was the great desire of David's heart?

How did the Lord respond through the prophet Nathan?

What was the covenant God made with David? (7:12–17)

What was the request of David found in the last verses of this chapter?

10. Where was the warrior David when he should have been on the battlefield? (See 2 Sam. 11)

How did David try to cover up his sin? How did he resolve the situation?

How did David feel later about what he had done? (Psalm 51)

11. We really see the kind of man David was in 2 Samuel 12. Relate the message the prophet Nathan brought to David. Give the response of both David and Nathan in 2 Sam. 12:13.

What would be the result of the sin David had committed?

In your own words, state the thought David expresses in 2 Sam. 12:22–23.

What son did God give to David to replace the son who died? _____

What lesson might we learn from this? (Hebrews 12:5–6)

12. One of David's sons was Absalom. Describe this young man (2 Sam. 14:25–26). What did this young man attempt to do? (2 Sam. 15:1–6)

What did David feel compelled to do? (2 Sam. 15:14) _____

How did this terrible conflict with Absalom end? (2 Sam. 18:9–17)

13. At the beginning of 1 Kings, we are told of David in his old age. How did David assure a peaceful transfer of power after his death? (1 Kings 1:33–34)

14. What words are used to describe David's death (1 Kings 2:10–12)? What do you think this implied?

15. What was helpful to you in this study of David?



GREAT PEOPLE

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

DAVID

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Always remember why it was He chose you to believe in Him as your Lord and Savior, find forgiveness for your sins and have the hope of everlasting life, so that out of love you will serve Him and witness for Him.

KING DAVID – GOD'S MAN

One of the lessons we learn from the life of King David is the importance of training children properly. David's life was filled with great sorrow and disappointment in his children. We are well able to pinpoint the likely reason, but more important is that we do not make the same mistakes in our own lives.

We need to look at the investment we have made in our children. We live in an age when pressure is put upon parents from many directions. We often find it easier to yield to the temptation of choosing things of lesser importance than investing in greater things. We forget that we are building the house today in which the children will live tomorrow. Much heartache in life might be avoided if we learned to build the house of our children's lives on a more solid foundation so they grow up with the security of knowing right from wrong. For this we need a sound understanding of what God says in His Word, and we must make sure our children gain that understanding too.

The church is to help parents in their important responsibility to their children. This is why so much emphasis is placed on Christian education. High moral standards do not hinder them in their enjoyment of life but rather give a feeling of security so life can be enjoyed. The motivating force must be the love God has shown to them, to which they respond in love. When this happens, they will find happiness and satisfaction in what they do, for they remember what Jesus did for them.



DAVID AS KING

After all the trials of his youth, including the persecution by King Saul, David finally succeeded to the throne. This was at least twenty years after Samuel had anointed him to be king. Almost at once David had to contend with conflicting forces. There were those who were determined that a descendant of Saul should reign in the land; there was also the power struggle between Joab, who had become the leader of David's army, and Abner, who was the general for Saul. David was able to handle these conflicts with God's help and by the strength of his powerful personality.

As time passed, David succeeded in defeating all the enemies of Israel, particularly the Philistines, who had caused Saul so much difficulty. In conquering these enemy nations, David and his people became more and more the ruling power of that part of the world.

The time came when there was peace and a great portion of the civilized world paid tribute to David and his victorious armies. It was a time of glory for Israel.

Time does not permit us to study each of the encounters which caused the ascendancy of King David. One of the most important accomplishments was the capture of the city of Jerusalem, which had been an impregnable stronghold throughout the years. David not only took the city but also made it his own city and the seat of his government. These few verses tell the story of some of David's accomplishments (2 Sam. 5:7, 10, 25; 8:1, 5; 10:18–19).

DAVID WANTS TO BUILD A TEMPLE FOR GOD

2 SAMUEL 7

David was always conscious it was the Lord who made his accomplishments possible (Psalm 46). Now that he had a capital city, he desired to build a very special temple there for the Lord. David

had great reverence for the ark of the covenant, which was the symbol of God's presence among His people (2 Sam. 6). What was to be done with it now?

The attitude of David is expressed in 2 Sam. 7:2 where he says that since, after all these years, he has a permanent home, the ark of the Lord should have such a home too. The Lord appreciated this determination of David, but He did not allow him to build a temple. He sent the prophet Nathan to tell David that his son would build it instead (2 Sam. 7:12–13). David busied himself planning this temple so he could turn that plan over to his son who would succeed him. Solomon finally built the temple, a splendid building that honored the Lord.

In spite of his disappointment, David broke forth into a song of praise. It begins at verse 18, "Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, 'Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?'"

Perhaps we, out of love for the Lord, see projects we feel need to be accomplished for the furtherance of His Kingdom. The Lord may not allow us to be the ones through whom that project is accomplished. Instead, He may let us be the inspiration for the idea, so that we then have the joy of watching and encouraging others as the project is completed.

In this connection, God had a very strong message for David (2 Sam. 7:8–9). As we understand this message, we see why David was God's man. God reminded David it was He who had chosen him to be the leader of His people, despite the fact David was only a lowly shepherd, unlikely to become a king. Yet, a king he became and was successful. His enemies had been vanquished and his name widely known.

We need to apply this message to ourselves! Really, who are we? Yet, of all the people in our

community, God has chosen us and our children to be His people. Are we conscious of what this involves? It means we are to be different from the people around us, with lives centered in Jesus Christ and lived to His glory. God chose us for that high honor. Do we regard it as such?

We are inclined to speak of the hypocrisy in the lives of other people who we feel are not living according to the standard of their religion. But are we living up to the standards of the religion of Jesus Christ? Listen to a few of the statements Jesus made:

- “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples’” (John 8:31). We are to remain faithful.
- “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39). We are to study the Bible.
- “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). We are to participate in worship and the Lord’s Supper.
- “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). We are to train our children for Christian living.

These are all positive statements by the Lord, things for us to aim at. We need to examine ourselves carefully to see how well we are doing. Always remember why it was He chose you to believe in Him as your Lord and Savior, find forgiveness for your sins and have the hope of everlasting life, so that out of love you will serve Him and witness for Him.

DAVID’S TERRIBLE SIN

2 SAMUEL 11

Despite the great love David had for the Lord, he was still a sinful mortal as he confessed in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” In Chapter 11, we read about a terrible sin David committed, and from his experience we can learn important lessons.

David had always been active in leading his army against the enemies of his nation but perhaps he was weary. When Israel went to war against the Amorites, David remained behind in his castle in Jerusalem. Here a great temptation came to him. In the evening, David was not able to sleep; perhaps it was very hot so he decided to take a walk on the portico of his house. While there he saw his neighbor’s beautiful wife taking a bath, possibly to cool herself. This was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, who was an officer in David’s army.

David invited her to come to him and she consented. Their encounter culminated in the sin of adultery. As a result, Bathsheba was with child and now did not know what to do because her husband had been gone for a long time. David immediately ordered Uriah brought home and insisted that he spend some time with his wife. But Uriah refused to go to his wife saying it was not proper while he was involved in a military campaign. He returned to his forces without having had relations with his wife.

Bathsheba and David were now desperate, so David, in order to cover his sin, plotted Uriah’s death by ordering that in the next battle he be placed in a position where he surely would lose his life. When Uriah was dead, Bathsheba “lamented over her husband.” When the period of mourning was at an end, David took her for one of his wives and she bore him a son.

“But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Sam. 11:27). The Lord sent the prophet Nathan to confront David about the terrible sin he had committed. He pronounced the judgment that would befall David because of his sin. David’s personal life would never be peaceful again; there would be violence in his own home and the child of Bathsheba would not live. It was a severe judgment but surely teaches us that the Lord does not wink at the sins of His children.

The mettle of which David was made then came to the fore (2 Sam. 12:13). David made a sincere confession to God’s prophet: “I have sinned against the LORD.” He acknowledged his sin was not simply against Uriah or against his own people but directly against the Lord. How very important it is for us to realize our sins are committed against the Lord and they drive a wedge between our God and us. We must be careful that our confession, when we make it, is not just a lot of words but also a sincere expression of remorse for the sins of which we have become guilty.

Making this kind of a confession allowed Nathan, as God’s minister, to say to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.” God wants His children to have absolution whenever they confess their sins. He never wants them to despair because of their sins but to be cleansed. This is exactly what our pastor does for us on Sunday morning in the absolution he pronounces after we have confessed our sins. He assures us of forgiveness and sends us forth to live as God desires.

“You shall not die” (2 Sam. 12:13). Our sins deserve death. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). When we are sincere in our confession, God is ready to reach out to us and forgive us. This forgiveness has been purchased for us by our Savior Jesus Christ. The punishment for our sin is removed and God can hold out to us the promise of eternal life (1 John 1:9).

DAVID’S GRIEF AT THE DEATH OF HIS SON

Very simply it is said, “The child died.” This child was dearly cherished by both mother and father. When he became seriously ill (2 Sam. 12:15), David showed us why we are right to call him God’s man. He went to the Lord in prayer, humbled himself, fasted and poured out his heart. He spent the entire night with the Lord in prayer and would not be comforted by his companions. This went on for seven days and then the child died.

David’s friends did not know how David would react but it is here we see David at his best as a child of God. His words in 2 Sam. 12:22–23 deserve our attention. He said as long as there was hope the child might live, he did everything possible to let the Lord know how sad he was over his sin and how eager he was for the Lord’s forgiveness.

In the death of the child, David received his answer from the Lord. David yielded to God’s will that the child should not live, and he was at peace with the Lord. Now he could end his fasting and go on living his life. He could not bring this child back by anything he could do, but by becoming right with the Lord he could assure himself he would go where the child was. As Christians, we know this place is heaven.

God, in His mercy, then gave a rich blessing to David. Bathsheba, whom he loved dearly, bore him another son whom he named Solomon. This son became a great joy to King David and would be his successor.

DAVID AND ABSALOM

Nathan had predicted, “The sword shall never depart from your house” (2 Sam. 12:10). Chapter 13 tells us of a shameful thing that happened among David’s children. Amnon, one of his sons, violated his half-sister, Tamar, who was a sister of another son, Absalom. Absalom avenged himself on Amnon by killing him. Absalom knew he could not return to his father’s home so he went into exile. This action grieved David because he dearly loved Absalom.

At this time, it appeared Absalom was by far the most talented of David's sons and surely, the possibility existed for him to become king. David again was in great sadness.

An intriguing event occurred at this time. Joab, David's general, noticed how distressed David was because of Absalom. He arranged for a wise woman from Tekoah to feign mourning and visit David to tell him a story that would show him the need to bring Absalom back from exile. You can read about this in 2 Sam. 14. So Absalom was brought back home.

Absalom had become a very haughty young man and he plotted against his father, hoping to take the throne away from him (2 Sam. 15:4–6). He gathered a following and began such a strong rebellion that David felt compelled to flee from Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15:13–27). David's army had to fight against the army of his own son. David, however, instructed Joab to spare the life of Absalom. The army of Absalom seemed to be gaining strength, and David had to flee across the Jordan River. A decisive battle was fought and David's forces prevailed. In fleeing, Absalom's hair became entangled in a mighty oak tree. While he was hanging by his hair, Joab killed him and ended the rebellion (2 Sam. 18). David's grief for his son was great (2 Sam. 18:33).

DAVID'S SIN OF PRIDE

2 SAMUEL 24

Toward the end of his reign, when he had peace with all his enemies, David determined to find out how many people were actually under his rule. This did not please the Lord and David knew it (2 Sam. 24:10). Once again, the Lord felt a need to chastise his faithful servant so he and his people might learn a needed lesson. He gave David a choice between three scourges. What a terrible thing that was for this warm-hearted king who truly loved his people. They are listed in 2 Sam. 24:13:

- three years of famine;
- three months of crushing warfare; or
- three days of pestilence throughout the land.

How could David make such a decision? As a man of God, David cast himself upon the mercy of God (2 Sam. 24:14) saying he would rather have the Lord deal with him, for He

is merciful. "Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man," he said. The Lord made the choice of great pestilence and seventy thousand men died.

It was at this time David truly humbled himself before the Lord (2 Sam. 24:17). He begged the Lord to end the pestilence, taking the full blame upon himself, saying his people were innocent of his sin. David then arranged for a special worship of the Lord so all the people might bow down before Him.

OLD AGE AND DEATH

1 KINGS 1–2

Adonijah, another of David's sons, tried to foment rebellion against his father (1 Kings 1:5), but it never even got started. Nathan the prophet spoke to Bathsheba and told her it was high time for David to announce his successor. The Lord had chosen Solomon and Nathan asked Bathsheba to use her influence to see that David named him. David then arranged for Solomon to be anointed king (1 Kings 1:32–39).

In 1 Kings 2, David gives his final instructions to Solomon, encouraging him to be faithful to the Lord and to live in harmony with Him. Then in a very few words, the death of this great man is recorded (1 Kings 2:10). He had been a great king who ruled over his people for forty years.

CONCLUSION

David is esteemed among us because he was a humble child of God. He is our inspiration today because he was God's man, a man who loved the Lord above everything else and who showed it in his daily life. We want to be God's men, women and children. We can be because God chose us as His children. God, in His grace, has kept us in our heritage to this moment and has defeated all the forces that sought to destroy us. Our desire then is to remain God's children because we want to serve the Lord, as did David.

Let us determine to cling to the Lord by faith; to put our whole life into His hands and hold fast with our whole heart to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Our greatest desire must be to discover how the Lord wants us to live. As we live in the Word of God, we become God's men and women.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

JONATHAN

Ask the Holy Spirit to provide His blessing as you look at the passages we study today.

1. As you read your notes on King David, what are some of the things in his life you would like to emulate?

Jonathan

2. In what kind of role do we find Jonathan (1 Sam. 13:1–3)?

How did Jonathan show his great courage? (1 Sam. 14:1–18). In whom did he place his full reliance?

How did the Lord give the victory of the Philistines to Jonathan?

3. What order did King Saul give his soldiers in 1 Sam. 14:24? What are we told about Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14:27?

4. This was a lesson on the use of an oath. What was the general teaching of Jesus with regard to the use of an oath? (Matt. 5:33–37)

5. A good example of the use of an oath is in the case of King Herod (Matt. 14:6–9). What was his oath and what was the result of his oath?

6. Why did Saul not carry out the conditions of his oath? (1 Sam. 14:45)

7. How would you describe the relationship that developed between David and Jonathan?

8. What was one way in which Jonathan showed his brotherly love for David?

9. State the promise these men made to each other (1 Sam. 20:14–17).

10. This brotherly love between these two men continued to the end of their lives. How did David express his feelings toward Jonathan at the time of Jonathan's death? (2 Sam. 1:26)

11. The courage of Jonathan is shown in his willingness to speak in defense of David to his father. What was the result? (1 Sam. 20:30–33)
- _____
12. We need to examine the matter of brotherly love. From the following Bible passages, state different ways in which brotherly love shows itself.
- 1 Kings 17:10–16 _____
- Matthew 10:42 _____
- Luke 10:30–37 _____
- Luke 17:3–4 _____
- Acts 9:36–39 _____
- John 1:40–42 _____
- 1 Timothy 5:16 _____
- Which was most meaningful to you?
- _____
13. Read John 15:9–13. What is the first thought that came to you when you read these verses?
- _____
14. When Saul consulted the witch of Endor, what disturbing prediction did he receive regarding Jonathan? (1 Sam. 28:19)
- _____
15. How did Jonathan die? (1 Sam. 31:2)
- _____
16. The name Jonathan means “A Gift of the Lord.” What significance would this name have in the friendship between two people?
- _____
17. Despite the situation into which Jonathan and David were placed, they both realized they were children of God. This made a big difference. Discuss the value of Christian friends and share blessings you have experienced.
- _____

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We have in the story of Jonathan perhaps the most beautiful incident of brotherly love ever written.



JONATHAN – BROTHERLY LOVE

Our lesson today centers on love, the love one child of God has for another. We are looking at Jonathan, son of Saul and dear friend of David. Before we examine the relationship between Jonathan and David, let us take a closer look at the whole matter of Christian love.

A LIVING EXAMPLE OF LOVE

A visit to India is an unforgettable experience. Villages dot the countryside. In each village are untidy rows of mud houses. The streets are deserted except for groups of young children playing in the dust with arms and legs painfully thin and stomachs swollen from lack of food.

There are thousands of villages like that in India. Each one of those villages stands by itself, the people hardly aware there are other people living elsewhere. In these villages, the people are separated into castes so many of them cannot even speak to each other. All they have to look forward to is the little they can grow on their land. In their rainy season, they work day and night.

For many years, few paid attention to these poor people. Then several Christian countries sent people to teach them better farming methods. Our country invited their young people to come here so they might get an education and bring the knowledge they have gained back to their own people. Our church and other churches sent missionaries to teach them God loves them. With this message, the missionaries often brought healing medicines for the sick.

All these things tell people of the love God has for them. We understand they have difficulty believing this because life is so hard for them. But we are glad to do it because we have experienced God's goodness. With the Psalmist, we are able to say, "My cup overflows" (Psalm 23:5). It is God's love for us that makes us want to love others.

THE LOVE OF JESUS

One difficulty in presenting Old Testament lessons is that we do not always bring in the Gospel, as we should. But this lesson almost compels us to speak about the love Jesus has for us. The Bible sums it up well when it says, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The picture of our loving Savior is always before us.

We see Jesus walking the dusty streets, healing the sick and helping the poor, speaking words of comfort to the sorrowful and encouraging those who were depressed. We see Him walk into a house where a little girl lies dead and bring her back to life. We see Him on the sea with the frightened disciples when He stills a terrible storm. We see Him climb Calvary's holy mountain and watch as He allows men to nail Him to the cross. We hear Him pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). We listen as He cries, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). We see Him bow His head and die. We are even there to see Him come forth from the grave. He is alive and in the most wonderful way, He shows Himself to many. He tells His followers they are now at peace with God. What does it all add up to? You and I can spell the answer in four letters – L O V E. There is no question in our minds Jesus loves us dearly, loves us every moment of our lives.

Jesus says to us, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you," completely, unselfishly, even unto death (John 15:12). He summarizes all the commandments when he says, "You shall love the Lord your God

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–39).

Is it easy for us to love that way? We know only too well it is difficult because we continually must fight the pride and selfishness that dominate our lives. This is even true when it comes to those who are nearest and dearest to us. Within us is the feeling we have to protect and defend ourselves. We need help, we need inspiration if we are going to love the way we should. Jesus is that inspiration for us. He loved His mother and His foster father, His friends, the poor and the needy, and even His enemies. He teaches us how to love!

With that background, we look at the life of Jonathan to learn to appreciate this man. The thought may come to us that only God can love so we might as well forget trying for we can't love like God. That is true, but we have in the story of Jonathan perhaps the most beautiful incident of brotherly love ever written.

JONATHAN – THE SON OF SAUL

We are first introduced to Jonathan in 1 Sam. 13:3 where he is pictured as a warrior in the army of King Saul. In 1 Sam. 14:1, he is further identified as Saul's son. He was the eldest son of the king and so he had every right to expect he would succeed to the throne of his father. This would be a great honor because the Kingdom of Israel had become a mighty nation. We would expect him to be very resentful of anyone who might threaten his throne.

However, God had revealed to Saul that none of his sons would become king. As time went on, both Saul and Jonathan discovered the freckle-faced, red-haired young man who played the harp to soothe King Saul. His background was that of a shepherd, a shepherd who was to become the next king of Israel. One would indeed expect a coldness or possibly resentment between Jonathan and David to result.

If you had the position of Jonathan, what would your feelings have been toward David? Would you have hated him? Deep within yourself, would you have rejoiced when you saw how difficult life was for him because of persecution from your own father? Give it some thought before answering that question. We probably will never experience that type of situation but let us consider some comparable ones. What is our reaction when we have set our mind on some position of advancement and it is given to another; or when our son or daughter is up for a high honor at school and the honor is given to another? How do we feel toward the person who is being groomed to take our place on the job? Do we help this person or do we slyly do things to make this person look bad?

The love of Jonathan for David stands out so greatly because of the situation. Jonathan truly loved David as his best friend, in spite of the loss of position he would face. He did everything he could to protect David against the hatred of his father. Whenever he could, he spoke a kind word for David (1 Sam. 19:4).

JONATHAN WAS A MIGHTY WARRIOR

Jonathan was the leader of the forces of Israel who were victorious in their skirmishes with the Philistines (1 Sam. 13:3). With great bravery, he won a mighty victory over these people with the help of the Lord (1 Sam. 14:6–16, 23). God's blessing rested upon Jonathan.

King Saul showed he had lost his grip on things when, instead of turning to the Lord for guidance, he impetuously indicated he was going to make sure there would be a great victory. He gave orders no one was to eat until the victory was accomplished (1 Sam. 14:24). Jonathan had been involved in a battle and was unaware of the order of King Saul. He found some wild honey and ate it. When this was reported to Saul, he was ready to order the death of Jonathan (1 Sam. 14:44). But the people intervened stating Jonathan had been

God's servant that day and should not die. So his life was spared.

JONATHAN'S LOVING CARE FOR DAVID

As time went on, it was evident the break between Saul and David would be complete. David was going to have to flee for his life. Jonathan was aware of the fact that more and more soldiers were aligning themselves with David and the day would soon come when there would be a military showdown between the army of Saul and that of David. Jonathan also knew he was going to have to stick with his father and yet he had such a deep love for his dear friend, David. What a terrible situation! (1 Sam. 18:1).

In Chapter 20, the wonderful relationship between these two men is described. Jonathan promised David he would do anything he possibly could for him (1 Sam. 20:4). David, in turn, promised he would always befriend Jonathan and he would show kindness to Jonathan's family (1 Sam. 20:14–15). They made an arrangement so Jonathan was able to convey to David whether it was safe for David to remain near the court of Saul (1 Sam. 20:19, 22, 35–40). There follows the touching farewell between these two friends in 1 Sam. 20:41–42.

These two men sensed this would probably be the last time they would be able to talk and they had much on their hearts. Jonathan wanted to make absolutely sure David knew he held nothing against him. He said, "Go in peace!" as if saying, "Don't feel bad; don't live in regret because of what has happened."

How important this approach to life is for us! We could easily be disturbed looking back upon our lives thinking about the things we should have done differently or the things we now see as important which we neglected. Jonathan's example is that we should strive to have peace in our

hearts. This is possible because we are children of God and our lives are in God's hands. He directs us the way we should go. At times, we may misinterpret His direction but if we can honestly say we did what we thought was best at the moment, we should not live in regret.

Jonathan also reminds David the two of them had sworn friendship to each other "in the name of the Lord." The beautiful truth is God's children who love the Lord cannot fail to love each other. It is necessary for us to realize a person who receives an honor we expected to receive is a child of God just as we are. We need to love him just as much as we want him to love us. This may not be easy but it is important.

Once again, we see the wonderful character of Jonathan in 1 Sam. 23:16: "And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God." Saul was searching for David so he could kill him. Jonathan knew where David was, went to him and encouraged him not to lose heart by reminding him of his relationship with the Lord. What a noble man was Jonathan!

In his relationship with David, Jonathan made certain the Lord was always in the center (1 Sam. 20:42). He desired this relationship would continue even among their descendants. That is how Jonathan showed brotherly love and we can be assured this love was returned.

When Jonathan died an untimely death on the field of battle (1 Sam. 31:2), David mourned for him as one would for a son or a father. Read his words in 2 Sam. 1:19–26. When David's own children died, he could be comforted, but when Jonathan died, it was as though the heart went out of David. How deep his love for Jonathan was is seen in 2 Sam. 1:26. David had known love, but none like that of Jonathan.

Every truth that the Bible teaches us about God reveals to us that God loves us. We see it in His great act of creation when He made this wonderful

world for the benefit of mankind. In His great act of redemption, He so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son and we see that love personified in the person of His Son who went the way of the Cross for us. We see the love of God also in the work of sanctification through all that the Holy Spirit has done in bringing us to faith in Jesus and keeping us in that faith.

We are aware of God's love when we realize all that God has done to keep us as His children, even as He did for His people of the Old Testament. He has given and preserved for us His precious Word in the Holy Bible. He has given us the Sacraments of Baptism and the blessed Lord's Supper. He established His Church and has led us into a church that concerns itself with proclaiming the truths of His Word. So great is God's love for us!

The whole core of Jesus' teaching was "that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Love is directed to all people and all are to be loved as Jesus loved us with a complete, unselfish, overwhelming, all-embracing love.

Perhaps as we practice brotherly love, being properly motivated by the love that Jesus has for us, we can start a chain-reaction that may bring about a great deal of love in an otherwise cold world. Is this possible? It must be — otherwise Jesus would not have told us to love in the manner in which He loved.

CONCLUSION

What a better world it would be if we could learn to love as Jesus loved or even as Jonathan loved. If people are to love in this way, then we who know, believe and love Jesus must be an example so others may know, believe and love Him. Can we ever speak of any effort we exert or any money we give — out of love for Jesus — as being wasted? No, love is never wasted. Love makes life worthwhile and makes life a real expression of gratitude to our Savior whose love was such that He laid down His life for His friends. Let us strive to practice more love!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

SOLOMON

Pray the Holy Spirit will guide you today in your study of King Solomon.

Review:

1. From your notes, list some of the elements of true brotherly love.

2. Why was the love Jonathan had for David so remarkable?

1 Kings

3. Read 1 Kings 1:28–40. Who was Solomon's mother?

By what act did David indicate Solomon was to be the next king?

What did Zadok do to seal the kingship for Solomon? (1 Kings 1:39)

How did the people respond to David's choice of a king?

4. In what exemplary way did Solomon deal with his mother? (1 Kings 2:19)

5. Give the names of the three men Solomon eliminated (1 Kings 2:20–46). For what reason?

6. In 1 Kings 3:1–15 we see the character of Solomon.

How did Solomon reflect the training of his father? (1 Kings 3:3)

In his dream, what did the Lord allow Solomon to do?

For what did he ask?

What two-fold response did the Lord give to this request?

7. Describe the example given in 1 Kings 3:16–28 about the wisdom of Solomon.

8. What kind of reign did Solomon enjoy? (1 Kings 4:21)

What one thing about Solomon caught the attention of everyone? (1 Kings 4:34)

9. How did Solomon again show respect and loyalty for his father David? (1 Kings 5:5)

10. The Book of Proverbs was written by Solomon. In Proverbs 1:1–7, what thought particularly caught your attention?

11. In 1 Kings 6, we find the description of the temple. List some of the details you find in this chapter.

12. How did the Lord indicate His acceptance of the temple in 1 Kings 8:10–11?

13. In his dedicatory prayer, Solomon made some important observations. Express them in your own words:

1 Kings 8:23 _____

1 Kings 8:27 _____

1 Kings 8:33–34 _____

1 Kings 8:46 _____

1 Kings 8:56–57 _____

Describe the emotions the people had on this day of dedication. (1 Kings 8:66)

14. 1 Kings 10 reports the visit of the Queen of Sheba. How did she summarize the kingship of Solomon in 1 Kings 10:9?

15. Give the Bible's summation of Solomon in 1 Kings 10:23–24. _____

16. Describe the unhealthy situation described in 1 Kings 11. How many wives did Solomon have? _____
 What was the sad result of his marriage to so many women and what punishment did God pronounce upon Solomon? (1 Kings 11:11–12)

17. How did God propose to carry out his promise to David (1 Kings 11:13)? What does this tell you about God?

18. What positive example of Solomon's might you choose to follow?



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We all need a wise and understanding heart to be able to use the blessings God gives in a way that will be a blessing to us and to others.



SOLOMON – TRUE BLESSEDNESS

Remember the story of King Midas? He made a wish that everything he touched be turned to gold. His wish came true. His chair, his bed, his table, and everything on the table turned to gold. This king found himself surrounded with gold, delighted that he was now rich beyond his wildest dreams. Just think how rich a person would be today if everything he possessed was made of solid gold!

For King Midas, however, his “golden touch” became a big problem. When he touched his food, it also turned to gold. This was terrible, for who wants to eat a gold sandwich, gold vegetables or a gold piece of cake? Then one day his daughter ran to hug him, and she too turned to gold. Dreadful!

The story of King Solomon is almost a corollary of the legendary King Midas but not in the same way, because it was the Lord who blessed Solomon. He did it because He truly loved Solomon. Solomon became one of the richest men the world has ever known. We wonder why the Lord allowed Solomon to become that rich because his wealth was nearly his undoing. You can see at once that our study today will offer some very thought-provoking ideas. Solomon’s life challenges us to consider the nature of TRUE BLESSEDNESS.

THE YOUNG KING

Perhaps we need first to answer the question: “What is true blessedness?” All of us sense that this is something we really want and need, but if we

were asked what it is, we might find it difficult to define. We will be helped by looking at the young King Solomon, son of David and Bathsheba, who had been designated as the successor to his father.

The account in 1 Kings 3:5–14 gives us a clue about true blessedness. You can imagine how unprepared Solomon must have felt when he was thrust into the position of king over the vast empire that his father had established. It was at this time that the Lord appeared to him in a vision and said, “Ask what I shall give you.” Solomon did not say as King Midas had, “Grant that everything I touch may turn to gold.” No, King Solomon asked the Lord to give him a wise and understanding heart in order that he might rule his people well.

We sense at once that his request pleased the Lord very much. As a result, He gave Solomon a wisdom that became renowned in the world. The Lord added even more. He gave Solomon such wealth, as the world had never known. We are told the whole world came to see King Solomon.

TRUE BLESSEDNESS

What a great lesson for us is the attitude of King Solomon! Who of us would rather be a King Midas instead of a King Solomon? Here is the choice between being a man of great wealth that has no value or of being a man of great wealth upon whom the Lord smiles with His evident blessing. There are plenty of both kinds of people living today. There should be no doubt which you would choose. We all need a wise and understanding heart to be able to use the blessings God gives in a way that will be a blessing to us and to others.

The Scriptures are explicit in telling us what makes for true blessedness. In 1 Kings 1:36–37, Benaiah said he wished for Solomon that his throne would be greater even than that of the great King David, who had subjugated all the nations round about. But listen! “Blessed...are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28). When does God’s

blessing rest upon us? When we listen to the Word of God and then live according to it. Why do many people who are rich and successful have children running wild, spouses suing them for divorce, friends turning their backs on them, until they perhaps contemplate suicide? Does this sound like a success story? What is missing? The blessing of God, the blessing that comes from hearing the Word and keeping it; the blessing that came to Solomon who loved the Lord and meditated upon His Word. Solomon even wrote books that became part of the Bible, such as Proverbs.

“Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust” (Psalm 40:4). As we hear the Word of God, we realize more and more the need to put our complete trust in God and to get away from the Midas-like desire that all we touch would turn to gold. I love the words of King Solomon, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge [wisdom]; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

This leads us at once to the statement, “Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments” (Psalm 112:1). This adds a new dimension to true blessedness — fearing the Lord. This is not a slavish fear, a terror, a fright of God, but a reverential awe for the Lord. We have true blessedness in our relationship with God when we delight in doing His will because we know how great His love is for us. The story of Solomon’s life shows us a man who truly delighted in pleasing the Lord.

“Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Psalm 32:2). This tells us why we need not be afraid of God. It is because we know that we are at peace with the Lord, not by our efforts, not by keeping the commandments, not by our living according to the Golden Rule. We are at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, for He has earned forgiveness for our sins; He has removed the

curse of sin from us; He has freed us from death and hell, the punishment for sin. To know that and to believe it with all our hearts is true blessedness.

Now we can understand Psalm 1 when it says, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.” Doesn’t that sound like true blessedness?

SOME EARLY ACTS OF SOLOMON

When Bathsheba came to speak to King Solomon, the respect he showed her is worthy of our attention (1 Kings 2:19). He had a seat placed at his right hand, so that when people came to show their respect for him, they would also honor his mother. It was a noble example and one of the reasons the Lord blessed this young king. This is but an application of what the Lord says in the Fourth Commandment, “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land” (Ephesians 6:2–3).

Another thing that surprises us is that, at the outset, Solomon saw fit to eliminate three people who had caused him much difficulty:

- His step-brother Adonijah, who had visions of being king;
- Abiathar, the chief priest, a descendant of Eli, of whom God had said that He wanted no service from his children (1 Sam. 2:31–35); and
- Joab, the captain of David’s army, a ruthless man with blood on his hands, who did not fit into the peaceful reign that Solomon intended to promote. You can read about these people in 1 Kings 2. The young king showed he had complete control.

Solomon’s reign as king is described in 1 Kings 4:21. He reigned over all the nations that David had

subjugated. These nations paid tribute to the young king providing the source of his great wealth. This continued through the forty years of Solomon’s rule showing us that the Lord was truly blessing him.

The peaceful condition in his land also gave Solomon the opportunity to deal with many of the social problems of his day. He did this with such wisdom that his reputation was known everywhere and his capital city became the huge tourist attraction of his day (1 Kings 4:34).

SOLOMON, THE TEMPLE BUILDER

King David had desired to build a temple to the Lord in Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel. But the Lord did not allow this because his hands were filled with blood from the warfare during his reign. It was certainly fitting that Solomon could now undertake this great venture because peace reigned in the land.

David made the plans for the temple and no doubt made the arrangements for much of the material that would be needed to erect the temple. Solomon now carried out those plans (1 Kings 5:5). Only the best material went into the construction of this temple (5:17–18). Since much of the material had to come from foreign countries, the peaceful relationships that Solomon had with these countries allowed a free flow of supplies.

The size of the temple was not large. It was roughly 110 feet long, 35 feet wide, and 50 feet high at its apex. But the splendor of it was beyond description. Remember that the people gathered for worship did not meet inside the temple building. It would have been of inadequate size for the whole nation of Israel. Surrounding the temple were porches and it was here that the worshippers gathered. Jesus’ favorite porch was the one called Solomon’s porch.

An interesting fact about the temple was that all the pieces for its construction were prepared offsite. It was so well planned and designed that when they

were brought, every piece fit perfectly so there was never the sound of construction tools while it was being built (1 Kings 6:7). When the structure was completed, it was overlaid with gold and precious jewels. This temple is listed among the ancient wonders of the world. All the furnishings inside the temple were made of gold.

While Solomon was engaged in this venture, he was also building palaces for himself and his officials. Of course, Solomon would need quite a palace for himself and all his wives and children. Again, no expense was spared.

First Kings 8 describes the dedication of the temple and shows us Solomon at his best. You have his words of dedication in 1 Kings 8:12–13 with his great prayer beginning at verse 22. Like most prayers, he begins with words of praise to the Lord, acknowledging that there is no other god. He goes on to say that God is everywhere and is not confined to a temple like this one, and yet such a temple is necessary that people may know where the Lord can be found (vv. 27–29).

Next Solomon speaks wonderful words about the need his people have for God's forgiveness, saying among other things that there is no one who does not sin (vv. 34–36). He asks God to be gracious to them (v. 50) and reminds God once again that they are His people. At the close of his prayer, Solomon spoke a benediction over the people in verses 56–57, and concluded the dedication with an exhortation to the people of Israel to be faithful to the Lord (v. 61).

It was a day long remembered by the people. At the close of the day, they acknowledged what a blessing Solomon was to them. "On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their homes joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had shown to David his servant and to Israel his people" (v. 66).

THE LAST YEARS OF SOLOMON'S REIGN

In 1 Kings Chapter 10, we are told of the visit of the Queen of Sheba, one of the many people of royalty who came to Jerusalem to show their respect for King Solomon. She gives her impression of what she saw and we could summarize it as "the half was not told me" (10:6–9). David was a warrior but Solomon was a builder and the reign of these two men was the Golden Age in Israel's history. Egypt, Assyria and Babylon were weak at this time.

The wealth of King Solomon is described beginning at 1 Kings 10:14. A "talent" of gold weighed 75 pounds (1200 ounces). If one were to multiply 1200 ounces by the value of gold per ounce (more than \$1000 in 2016), then multiply that figure again by 666, Solomon's annual gold revenue, one would arrive at a staggering sum! Everything he possessed was gold. Verse 23 says that he "excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom." Five years after Solomon's death, all this wealth was taken by the King of Egypt. Well could Solomon say as he does in his book of Ecclesiastes (1:2), "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

Chapter 11 tells us that Solomon married a multitude of women from different nations and cultures, many of them no doubt for political reasons. In fact, he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Can you imagine the utter confusion in that household? Surely, there were many children too.

The sad thing was that in the weakness of his old age, these wives were able to turn the heart of Solomon away from his God who had blessed him so abundantly. This man of great wisdom, who seemingly enjoyed every blessing that life could offer, began to worship other gods who had done nothing for him. It is clear that he had not completely forsaken the Lord, but his zeal for the

So really, what does it come down to? TRUE BLESSEDNESS is mine only when the Holy Spirit brings me to faith in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I can fight Him and resist Him, but when I do, I close the door to true blessedness.



Lord was not the same. It says, “he did not wholly follow the LORD.”

All this was “evil in the sight of the LORD” (11:6). The Lord was disappointed in Solomon and angry. As punishment, the Lord took the kingdom away from Solomon and his descendants. However, since the Lord had promised David that his sons after him would be kings, He preserved one tribe for Solomon’s heir. In 1 Kings 12, we are told how his son Rehoboam so offended the people that all but the tribe of Judah forsook him.

The death of Solomon is reported in 11:43. The statement is simply made that he slept with his fathers. We sincerely hope this means he died in the faith of his fathers because we know what the final dimension of true blessedness is: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’” (Revelation 14:13).

CONCLUSION

Perhaps we need to ask one more question: When can we hope to have true blessedness? King Solomon can be a real help to us. He did

not enjoy his blessings because he was such a wonderful man, because in many ways he disappointed the Lord. He was not worthy in himself to be thus blessed by the Lord. So there has to be another reason why he received these blessings.

True blessedness comes to us only by the mercy of God. The Holy Spirit was able to work in King Solomon a deep love for the Lord. He was able to bring even this great king to realize that actually he was nothing in the sight of the Lord. We see him on his knees on that great day of dedication of the temple seeking God’s forgiveness. The reason he could ask for this pardon was that he believed the promise of God that eventually He would send a Savior “who would free His people from their sins.”

So really, what does it come down to? TRUE BLESSEDNESS is mine only when the Holy Spirit brings me to faith in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I can fight Him and resist Him, but when I do, I close the door to true blessedness. It ends up with one plea, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

PERSONAL APPLICATION

ELIJAH

*With a prayer in your heart that the Holy Spirit may lead you in your study,
you will be looking at 1 Kings, Chapters 17–21 and 2 Kings 2.*

Review:

1. As you read the notes, what did you discover was the secret of Solomon's success?

2. Mention something in the life of Solomon that you would like to appropriate for your own life.

1 Kings 17–21

3. Elijah was a prophet of the Lord at the time of King Ahab in Israel. What do you learn about Ahab in 1 Kings 16:29–33?

4. Read 1 Kings 17. Unexpectedly, Elijah bursts on the scene. What does he proclaim?

Having delivered his message, what was Elijah to do? How did the Lord care for His prophet?

5. We always need to remind ourselves of the promises God has given. What do you learn from the following?

Genesis 32:10 _____

Psalms 31:15 _____

Psalms 37:5 _____

Psalms 145:15–16 _____

1 Peter 5:7 _____

6. Beginning with 1 Kings 17:7–24, describe the arrangement the Lord made for Elijah after the brook dried up.

7. In what situation did he find the widow and what miraculous thing happened? Tell how Elijah was able to repay the woman for her kindness to him.

8. In time of trouble, what did Elijah remember to do? (Psalm 50:15) _____

9. Give the words expressing this woman's response to Elijah.

1 Kings 18

10. How long did the famine last and how severe was it? _____

What difficult thing did God tell Elijah to do? _____

Upon whom did Ahab place the blame? _____

Give Elijah's answer to Ahab. _____

How many prophets of Baal were there? _____

11. From verses 18:22–38, list the details of the contest suggested by Elijah.

12. What was the response of the people? (v. 39)

13. What happened after the test on Mount Carmel?

1 Kings 19

14. How would you describe Elijah's situation? (vv. 1–10)

15. Describe the way in which the Lord showed Elijah how He accomplishes His purpose. You will have to think about this. (vv. 11–15)

16. Beginning at verse 16, what two indications did the Lord give to Elijah that his ministry to Ahab was at an end?

17. Read 1 Kings 21:1–16. The main thing we learn from this incident is that it substantiates what the Lord says in the Ninth and Tenth Commandments: "You shall not covet." Describe the manner in which Ahab showed he was guilty of this sin. Briefly tell how Jezebel showed her true colors.

18. Describe the exciting event of Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11–14.

19. Share a lesson you learned from the life of Elijah.



GREAT PEOPLE

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

ELIJAH

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May this great man of God be a real inspiration to us to accept in simple faith the plan God has for our lives. It begins with our faith in Jesus and continues with the service of love that we render because we have experienced so much love at the hand of our loving God.

ELIJAH – FAITHFUL ALWAYS

The people in the Bible are real human beings. They are not fictional characters. Joshua is the dignified army general; Daniel is the college professor; Samson is the professional football tackle; and Esther is the beloved screen star. The man we want to study today is different from all of the others. Perhaps you know someone like him. Elijah was one of those wiry-type men who, though not large in stature, was strong and resilient. He was the kind of person who seems to bounce off trouble and come out of every adverse situation a winner.

It will be helpful for us to look at Elijah's life, which covers such a vast span of time in the Bible that we cannot study every detail. We will study only such incidents which are typical of his life and from which we will be able to draw some helpful lessons. The key to the whole life of Elijah can be summed up in two words: FAITHFUL ALWAYS.

ELIJAH AND KING AHAB

After his death, Solomon's kingdom was divided. His son, Rehoboam, was left with only the tribe of Judah, known as the Kingdom of Judah (Southern Kingdom). The remaining tribes selected their own king and were known as the Kingdom of Israel (Northern Kingdom). Our lesson will deal with this Northern Kingdom. Not one of the kings of Israel pleased the Lord and, very likely, this bore out the purpose that God had in establishing the unified worship around the temple in Jerusalem. For many years, the people of



Israel separated themselves from that temple. It was not long until they were worshipping the idols of their neighbors.

Elijah appears on the scene during the reign of King Ahab, who is described as an unusually wicked king (1 Kings 16:29-33). This was about 875 BC. Ahab's whole life was an offense against God. He had chosen as his wife Jezebel, an ungodly woman who did everything possible to destroy the true worship of the Lord and to replace it with the horrible worship of Baal.

God assigned Elijah the task of dealing with this ungodly king. His first assignment was to tell King Ahab that because of his wickedness there would be a severe famine over "all the land." During the famine, everyone would suffer and perhaps people would turn back to God (1 Kings 17:1).

GOD'S CARE FOR ELIJAH

In the meantime, the Lord arranged to take care of His prophet, which He did at the Brook of Cherith where the ravens daily brought him food to eat. This was truly a miracle! Of all the birds, the raven would be the last we would expect the Lord to use since they are scavengers (1 Kings 17:2-4). When finally this brook dried up because of the famine, the Lord instructed Elijah to walk across the whole land of Israel to the village of Zarephath, to the home of a widow.

He found her in the yard gathering sticks for a fire. She said that she had just enough flour and oil to bake one more loaf of bread but then she and her son would die. Elijah asked her to bake the loaf of bread for him. The Lord moved her to do it, and from that day on the flour in her bin and the oil in her cruse never diminished and there was food for this family each day (1 Kings 17:9-16).

Two lessons come to mind at once. The first is that the Lord places the right people in the right place at the right time. Of all the people in Israel, here is

a totally unknown widow in a deserted village and she becomes the provider for Elijah, who will bring the people back to God. It surely shows us that the life of everyone has great value in the sight of the Lord. He has tasks also for us which He will in time show us and expect us to fulfill.

The second thing is the wondrous manner in which God cares for His own. Jesus told us not to be concerned about the things we eat or drink or what we will wear but we should seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to us (Matt. 6:33). First Peter 5:7 (NIV) tells us to "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you." Why will we not take the Lord at His Word? We simply need to be faithful, work hard and trust the Lord for the results. The Lord will never let us down. It will get rough at times, but somehow He will see us through.

When Elijah was staying with the widow, her son became seriously ill and died. You can well imagine that this was a terrible blow to both the widow and the prophet. It was one of those things difficult to explain. The prophet took the dead boy to his chamber and prayed over him, and the Lord restored the lad to life (1 Kings 17:17-24). You can picture the joy of this mother. She expressed it in an unusual way (17:24), acknowledging that Elijah was indeed a man of God and that the words he spoke were the words of the Lord. Ought not this to be the attitude we have toward our faithful pastors?

What a great lesson there is for us here. Not that we should expect the Lord to miraculously restore the life of our loved ones, but that He will do for us those things that are best. Generally when God takes a loved one from us it is because He has chosen it to be the best way. But at the same time, He will provide us with the strength and comfort we need and, in some way, compensate us for the loss. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

TIME FOR THE FAMINE TO END

By this time, the people had recognized their sin and that their god Baal was doing nothing for them. They were ready once again to turn to the Lord and to seek His forgiveness. The Lord decided to put an end to the famine and sent Elijah to King Ahab to announce His decision. It took real courage on the part of the prophet because he knew how hateful King Ahab could be. Ahab greeted him with the words, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” and showed no remorse. Very likely, he had not suffered much. Elijah boldly responded that it was Ahab himself who was responsible because he had turned the people from God to the idol Baal. Now the Lord, in His mercy, was desirous of righting things (18:17-19).

THE TEST ON MOUNT CARMEL

Elijah now arranged for a great event to take place by which he would prove to all that the Lord God was indeed the King of heaven and earth and that Baal was nothing. He charged all the prophets of Baal to meet him at Mount Carmel and there suggested that the prophets and he each erect an altar. They would place upon the altars a bull which had been prepared for sacrifice. Each would call upon their gods to see who would send fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. It was a challenge which the prophets of Baal dared not refuse.

In the morning, the prophets erected their altar and prepared the sacrifice. They began to pray for the fire from Baal’s heaven, but nothing happened. They became frantic, but still no fire. In the meantime, Elijah was goading them on, telling them to shout louder because maybe their god was asleep. Toward evening, Elijah prepared his altar, arranged the sacrifice upon it, and doused it well with water so no one could suspect trickery. Then he got down on his knees

and prayed to the Lord God, “‘O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.’ At once fire came down from heaven, consumed the sacrifice and even licked up the water. The people cried out, ‘The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God’” (1 Kings 18).

Elijah was a courageous man. He dared stand up for the Lord and His honor and came out of it all with a great victory. This surely tells us that if we do what we know is right and ask the Lord to sustain us; the Lord will see us through. It is God who has brought us into His Kingdom; it is He who has given us the assignment we have in the work that is to be done; and it is He who makes it possible for us to succeed. The important thing is that we know we are acting according to His will and this we can only know when we are right with the Lord. There is only one way that we can be right with the Lord, that is to seek forgiveness for our many sins, and then to believe that because of Jesus, God will forgive us.

A DISCOURAGED PROPHET

That day rain fell and the famine was ended. With great courage Elijah, knowing God was with him, insisted that all the prophets of Baal be put to death. When Queen Jezebel learned what had happened and all the prophets of Baal had been put to death, she was determined that Elijah too must die (1 Kings 19:2). Despite his great victory, Elijah felt compelled to flee for his life. He was a very depressed and discouraged man who should have been reveling in his great victory for the Lord.

So discouraged had Elijah become that he actually asked the Lord to put an end to his life (1 Kings 19:4). Many of us have been depressed at one time or another. With the help of the Lord, something we attempted was really successful, but then there was some individual who took all the joy away and we felt crushed and depressed. When we should have been rejoicing, we were sorrowful. Isn't that human nature? How difficult it is for us to put our complete trust in the Lord and let Him handle the results!

An angel appeared to Elijah and provided him with food (19:5). After Elijah had eaten of the food, we are told he had strength enough to survive forty days and forty nights until he came to Mount Horeb where he was again assured of the presence of the Lord in his life. This assurance came in a very special way. Elijah was conscious of the great forces in nature — a mighty wind, an earthquake, a devastating fire — but none of these revealed to him the presence of the Lord. Then came a very quiet small voice and it was that voice that caused the prophet to recognize the presence of God. The small voice told him that God deals with the simple testimony of his faithful people rather than the mighty forces of those who try to put on a show for their own benefit.

Our experience in life is not different. When we are discouraged and depressed the Lord also sends His angel to us. It may be a dear friend or a faithful pastor who provides the spiritual food we need. They offer food that comes from the Word of the Lord and, in the strength of that food, we can go on because we know the Lord is with us. Let us not become discouraged by those things that hinder us as we try to do what we believe God wants us to do.

ELIJAH AND HIS DEALING WITH KING AHAB

The Lord revealed to Elijah that there were still seven thousand faithful people in Israel (1 Kings 19:18). At this time, the mighty Syrian army attacked the Kingdom of Israel but the Lord assured King Ahab that He would gain the victory for him in a special way. This is

described in 1 Kings 20. Israel won a mighty victory and all knew it was the Lord who fought for them.

While the people may have turned again to the Lord, King Ahab did not. That, no doubt, was due to the influence of the ungodly Jezebel. Now an incident occurred which clearly showed the character of Ahab (1 Kings 21). Ahab observed that his neighbor, Naboth, had a beautiful vineyard. He wanted to add this vineyard to his palace grounds. He tried to negotiate with Naboth for this vineyard. For very personal and legitimate reasons, Naboth refused to part with his vineyard. King Ahab pouted, refused to eat, and lay upon his couch in a huff until Queen Jezebel found him. Having learned the reason for Ahab's behavior, she told the king she would take care of the situation. She then had Naboth falsely accused of blasphemy, which carried with it the punishment of the death sentence, and the property of anyone thus executed reverted to the king. So we see how coveting led to false witness, murder, and outright robbery. So Ahab got his vineyard!

Now the prophet Elijah steps into the picture and it is here that we see his courage. God sends him to confront Ahab, to denounce him for his wickedness and to tell him that his punishment would be severe. He and Jezebel would die a terrible death and there would be no blessing upon his sons (1 Kings 21:17-24).

Ahab did humble himself before the Lord (1 Kings 21:29), but Jezebel continued in her devilish ways to the end and died a horrible death (2 Kings 9:30-37). Thus, God was vindicated. That is why Paul counsels us, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Romans 12:19). Let us do our duty faithfully and whatever wrong we suffer the Lord will set right in due time.

The prophet Elijah served the Lord for many more years. He had dealings with Ahab's son Ahaziah that were just as discouraging as had been those with his father. But Elijah continued faithfully in the will of the Lord.

*Out of a whirlwind came a chariot of fire and Elijah
was carried up into heaven without seeing death.
He left his mantle behind which Elisha at once took
as a symbol of the presence of God in his life.*



ELIJAH'S ASCENSION TO HEAVEN

As Elijah's life was coming to an end, the Lord helped him to choose his successor, a man named Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21). Elijah knew that the time for his death had come (2 Kings 2:1). He took Elisha with him and went into the area beyond the Jordan River. He tried to get Elisha to stay behind but he refused. As they came to the Jordan, Elijah took his mantle and struck the waters of the river and they divided allowing he and Elisha to walk across on dry ground. Then Elijah told Elisha to ask a blessing of him. Elisha requested that a double portion of the spirit of Elijah might rest upon him. The Lord honored this request as we will learn from the life of Elisha.

Next, a dramatic thing happened (2 Kings 2:11)! Out of a whirlwind came a chariot of fire and Elijah was carried up into heaven without seeing death. He left his mantle behind which Elisha at once took as a symbol of the presence of God in his life. Enoch, one of the early men of God, also went to heaven without seeing death (Genesis 5:24). We are told in Deuteronomy 34:5-6 that Moses died and God buried him "in the valley in the land of Moab...but no man knows the place of his burial to this day." We hear about Moses again in Matthew 17:3 when he and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus.

The passing of Elijah is a great comfort to us showing that the Lord keeps His faithful people in mind and that He gives them special favors that take many forms. We too, will be carried to heaven when our time comes because of our faith in Jesus as our Savior, not in a chariot of fire but on angel's arms, to be forever with the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the Mount of Transfiguration, it is significant that one of those appearing with Jesus was the prophet Elijah. He and Moses had both borne faithful witness to God. May this great man of God be a real inspiration to us to accept in simple faith the plan God has for our lives. It begins with our faith in Jesus and continues with the service of love that we render because we have experienced so much love at the hand of our loving God.

Like Elijah, let us strive for FAITHFULNESS ALWAYS.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

ELISHA

Ask the Lord to open your heart that the Holy Spirit may guide you to understand the very interesting life of Elisha from Scripture passages in 2 Kings.

Review

1. As you reviewed the life of Elijah, what particularly impressed you?

2. What comparison can we make between the death of Elijah and our own death?

Read 2 Kings 2:1-15

3. What request did Elisha make when Elijah told him that he could ask for anything he wanted?

4. Tell what Elijah left behind when he ascended into heaven and explain why.

5. What wondrous thing did Elisha do at Jericho? (2 Kings 2:19-22)

6. In 2 Kings 2:23-24, what happened to the boys of Bethel and what lesson is being taught?

7. Describe the problem of the widow in 2 Kings 4:1-7 and give Elisha's solution to the problem.

8. Read the account found in 2 Kings 4:8-37.
What great need did the Shunammite woman have?

What great sorrow came into her life?

Elisha performed a miracle with the help of God. List some basics about the incident.

9. Give the details told about Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1-19.

What cure does Elisha suggest? What was Naaman's reaction?

Contrast Elisha's response to Naaman's gratitude with Gehazi's actions. (2 Kings 5:16-27).

10. Describe the miracle that Elisha performed at the school of the prophets. (2 Kings 6:1-7)

11. In 2 Kings 6:8-23, what ability did the prophet Elisha have that was helpful to the king of Israel?

What did the king of Assyria realize he would have to do if he was going to defeat Israel?

What do you learn from Elisha's response to his servant when he saw the enemy's army (2 Kings 6:16-17)?

How did Elisha — with God's help — take care of this enemy force?

12. To summarize the life of Elisha, study the context of the following Bible verses and write what each of them teaches us.

Luke 1:37

Genesis 18:14

Jeremiah 32:17

Matthew 19:26

Romans 4:21

13. How could you apply the verses listed in #12 to your life today?

14. Explain your understanding of Romans 8:28.

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The Lord preserved the story of the prophet Elisha in order to teach us some important truths. The age of miracles is not at an end, nor has the almighty power of God slackened.



ELISHA – WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

We are acquainted with the familiar labels “Made in the U.S.A.,” “Made in Japan,” “Made in China.” Did you know that on every piece of bread you eat, there is a label, invisible but nevertheless real, which says, “Made in Heaven”? Without the hand of God, all the scientific knowledge and skill of men could not produce a single slice of bread. The ingredients, the formula, the processes of nature that go into the making of our daily bread are all the property of heaven. How fortunate we are to have such a benevolent God who sees to it that we have far more than just a slice of bread.

The Lord preserved the story of the prophet Elisha in order to teach us some important truths. The age of miracles is not at an end, nor has the almighty power of God slackened. While man may have gained more knowledge or insight under the blessing of God, he is still a frail, sinful mortal. While focused on his own achievements, he frequently loses contact with almighty God.

In this study, we have the story of the Old Testament “Houdini,” the prophet Elisha, a devout man of God who accomplished his feats with the assistance of God. This man became the magician of the Bible. Talk about an escape artist! Houdini could not have escaped from the things that Elisha encountered. WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.

THE LAUNCHING OF HIS PROPHETIC CAREER

As Elisha looked on, the prophet Elijah was carried into heaven in a fiery chariot. Elisha, upon the suggestion of Elijah (2 Kings 2:9), had requested a double portion of the spirit of Elijah in order to better serve as God's prophet in Israel. In his ascent into heaven, Elijah left his mantle behind, the mantle with which he struck the waters of the Jordan River and they parted. Elisha took up that mantle as a symbol that the power of God was now upon him. When those who attended the school of prophets saw him, they remarked that the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha (2 Kings 2:15).

As Elisha went through the country visiting the various schools where the young men were being trained in their religious beliefs, he was continually confronted with problems. With the help of God, he was able to cope with these problems. He prayed for the Holy Spirit and the Lord answered his prayer. *Let's examine some of the miracles.*

HEALING THE WATERS

2 KINGS 2:19-22

Elisha had come to Jericho where the people had a big complaint. They had water, but it had become so polluted that they could not drink it, and it had lost its power to nourish their crops. They were suffering as if there were a famine.

The prophet dealt with the problem in a very simple way. He asked for a new bowl filled with salt. He then cast the salt into the spring from where their water came and, at once, the water was pure and sweet. This was the opposite of what you would expect, something only the Lord's help could accomplish.

THE BOYS OF BETHEL

2 KINGS 2:23-25

Elisha evidently was not a young man anymore, for as he approached Bethel some boys of that village came out and mocked the prophet because of his baldness. They likely knew that he was God's prophet, but still they showed disrespect. We, too, are acquainted with young people who have no respect for their elders.

This saintly man of God knew that disrespect for his office showed disrespect for God, and he placed God's curse upon them. Their punishment followed when two she-bears came out of the woods and attacked those boys. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked" (Galatians 6:7). God expects us to show the proper respect for the spiritual leaders He has given us. In dishonoring them, we dishonor Him (Luke 10:16). In order that our young people may enjoy a real blessing from God, we need to impress this fact upon them.

HELPING THE WIDOW

2 KINGS 4:1-7

One day the prophet was confronted with a very common situation. He met a woman who was a widow and unable to support herself and her family. Her creditors were demanding payment or else they would take her two sons as indentured servants.

Once again, Elisha had a simple solution. The one commodity she had left was a jar of olive oil. The prophet told her to borrow all the containers she could from her neighbors and to pour from her jar of oil into them. She kept pouring and the oil kept flowing and filled all those jars. The prophet then told her to sell this valuable oil. She then had enough income to satisfy all her creditors and to get a new start in life.

THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

2 KINGS 4:8-37

As the prophet was travelling one day near Shunem, a wealthy woman invited him to come into her home for a bite to eat. She encouraged the prophet to come again when he passed that way. One day, Elisha noticed that the woman seemed very sad. He discovered the reason for her sadness was that she had no child, and because of the age of her husband, she had no prospect of having one. The prophet assured her, "About this time next year, you will hold a son in your arms." It happened just as Elisha said.

When the child became a little older, he went out into the field where his father was working. He suffered sunstroke and died. She took her dead son into the prophet's room. She then asked one of the servants to take her to the prophet to whom she expressed her great grief and disappointment. Elisha went with the Shunammite woman to her home and went alone into the death chamber. He prayed to the Lord and cast himself upon the dead child. He noticed that the flesh of the child became warm. He again lay upon the child who sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. Elisha thus gave back to this kind woman the son that meant so much to her.

THE HEALING OF THE SYRIAN CAPTAIN

2 KINGS 5:1-27

The general of the Syrian army was a man named Naaman. He had the horrible disease of leprosy, which made it impossible for him to function in his duties since he had to isolate himself from people. One day his young Jewish slave girl suggested that he go to her land and see Elisha, the prophet of the Lord.

What a wonderful example of the simple witness a child is able to give when the situation arises. This girl expressed her faith simply, knowing that God worked through Elisha to relieve the difficulties of people. She was confident that God could also help her master. When such opportunities come to us, do we hesitate or speak out?

Naaman expected the prophet would go out of his way in order to help him. Instead, when Elisha learned of the

problem, he did not go but sent his servant Gehazi to tell the captain to bathe seven times in the Jordan River. This was very offensive to Naaman. He said there are cleaner rivers than the Jordan in his country. In a rage, he turned to go home.

However, his servants prevailed upon him to try what Elisha suggested. They said that if the prophet had asked him to do some unusual thing he would have gladly done it. Why should he refuse to do something that seemed so natural as to wash and be clean? So Naaman went to the Jordan River, dipped himself seven times into its waters, and came out perfectly healed of his leprosy.

You may well imagine Naaman's joy. He went to the prophet to thank him and then offered him a gift. Elisha refused the gift, for he was merely carrying out the tasks God had given him to do (2 Kings 5:16). However, his servant Gehazi coveted the rich treasure that Naaman was ready to give his master, so he ran after Naaman and told him that some needy strangers had come to the home of the prophet and that his master could use the treasure. Thus, the servant was given the wealth. God revealed to Elisha what Gehazi had done. Elisha cursed the servant and the leprosy of Naaman fell upon Gehazi.

THE IRON THAT FLOATED

2 KINGS 6:1-7

One day Elisha visited one of the schools where the Jewish boys were studying the Scriptures. The young men were building an addition to their school and as they were cutting down a tree that overhung the river, the axe head flew off and went into the water. Of course, it sank to the bottom of the muddy slime. They didn't know what to do, for they had no other axe. With the help of the Lord, the prophet caused the axe head to float to the top of the water so the boys were able to retrieve it.

Elisha performed one miracle after another, always to help people who were in a crisis. We are reminded of our Lord Jesus as He went through the countryside always stopping to help someone who was in real need. We don't expect that the Lord will give us the ability

to perform such obvious miracles as Elisha, but the Lord does ask us to help and befriend our neighbor in need. We should always be ready and willing to do this. Thus, we become tools in the hand of God and the Lord may actually perform a miracle through us.

ELISHA AND THE ASSYRIANS

2 KINGS 6:8 TO 7:20

The king of Syria warred against Israel. Each time the king would attack, the armies of Israel were ready for him. Someone told him that it was the prophet Elisha who told the Israelites where the next attack would come. The king of Assyria sent a force to capture Elisha and thus put an end to these constant defeats. This force surrounded the area where Elisha was and the prophet's servant was terrified. Elisha very calmly declared, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). Then Elisha asked the Lord to open the eyes of his servant and he saw they were surrounded by a mighty host of horses and chariots of fire so that the king's forces could not harm God's prophet.

Elisha then asked the Lord to strike the enemy forces with blindness. Elisha himself became their guide and led them into Samaria. The king of Israel wanted to fall upon this force and destroy it but Elisha would not allow it. Instead, he suggested they treat them well and when this force returned to their headquarters and reported what had happened, the Syrians stopped their campaign. We are reminded of the words of Paul in Romans 12:20; "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." By rewarding good for evil, we may well cause our enemy to reconsider his actions.

In a later conflict with the Syrians (2 Kings 7:1-11), Samaria was besieged. There were four lepers who had been barred from their city and were destitute. When God caused the enemy to hear the sound of a great army, the Syrians fled in haste and left many things behind. But the lepers didn't know this, and thinking they would die anyway, decided to ask the Syrians for help.

When they came to the camp, they found it abandoned and were able to retrieve a great hoard of wealth. Then they realized that in their city there were many who were also destitute because of the Syrian siege. They said to each other, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news...let us go and tell the king's household" (2 Kings 7:9).

We can learn much from this event. There is a spiritual famine in the world today because people don't know God and His Son, our Savior. God has led us to discover a great wealth in Him, forgiveness, peace, joy, hope. But "we're not doing right" if we now hoard these blessings for ourselves. We must realize this is "a day of good news" and share our discovery with others. That is what these lepers did, and all were helped.

THE DEATH OF ELISHA

2 KINGS 13:14-21

Elisha became ill and died, and all including the king wept over him. He was buried with honors, but even in his death, there was still a miracle that was done. The Moabites now invaded Israel and in a skirmish, a man was killed. As his friends were digging a grave in which to bury him, they saw another group of the enemy approaching so they quickly threw his body into the tomb of Elisha. When his body touched the bones of Elisha, it revived and he stood on his feet (2 Kings 13:21).

CONCLUSION

The unusual story of Elisha prompts reflection. We all have some dire need, some problem, or some situation with which we cannot cope. The question is — how do we deal with such a difficulty? Do we try to meet it completely on our own? Do we have confidence in ourselves and think that with our own ability and ingenuity we can work out the problem? If that is the basis for our hope then we are doomed to failure. Certainly, we are to use the wisdom, the common sense that God has given us and we also are to turn to other people such as doctors, mechanics and lawyers. But we don't start there.

The first thing we need to learn when there is a problem confronting us is to turn to the Lord for guidance. In some way, He will always indicate to us what we should do either through His Word, one of our friends, or through other means. Yet God does not want us to sit in our rocking chair and say, “Lord, you take o’er!” and do absolutely nothing for ourselves. God has commanded us to pray, but also to work. He wants us to use the abilities and resources He has given us to find the help we need.

Did you notice how true this was in the miracles that the Lord allowed Elisha to perform? How did the widow get the money to pay her debts? How was Naaman healed from his leprosy? Each was given something to do. Some “natural means” was employed. When we are sick, God wants us to turn to Him and ask Him, if it is His will, to make us well. Then we should consult a doctor and use the treatment that he prescribes. It is only God who can make us well but He often does it through human agencies. The best doctor in the world cannot make us well if God’s plan for us is different. We are to put our complete trust in God and also use the resources that He has provided.

Why was Elisha able to do these wonderful things? Better, why was the Lord able to use Elisha as His agent to be of such great assistance to people who had some real problems? The reason was that the Lord awakened in Elisha a sincere faith and trust. Take note that the Lord did this, for people find it very difficult to see that they cannot establish a relationship with God themselves. They even are inclined to look upon their faith as an act on their part.

The truth is, that left to ourselves, we would not believe and trust in God, and certainly not accept what God has done for us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Elisha did believe that God could help in every need, even in the greatest need, for he knew that he was a sinner. He believed completely in God’s promises and because of his faith, God could use him. And it is because of our faith that God is going to be able to use us.

For what purpose did God want to use Elisha? Why did He allow him to perform these miracles? Very simply, through him, God wanted to help other people, and through him, God was to be glorified. The account given to us of his life leaves the impression that each time he performed a miracle the people always knew it was God who had done this wonderful thing. Usually the prophet quietly slipped away, perhaps before anyone had a chance to thank him.

We all need to be filled with the spirit of Elisha, the double spirit that he had inherited from Elijah. Think of what could happen if each of us had that spirit. Then God’s people would be gathered around the Word to study it and things would be happening. The people would know exactly what God wanted them to do. They would be excited because they would see themselves as God’s agents, witnessing to God’s grace, speaking about the peace they found in Christ, the joy that is theirs in the service of the Savior, and most important, the hope that fills their hearts because they know they are going to heaven.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

HEZEKIAH

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your study of a great man of God whose life is described in 2 Kings, Chapters 16-20.

Review

1. As you read your notes, state why you remember the prophet Elisha.

2. What was it that made him so capable of helping people in their needs?

King Hezekiah

3. King Hezekiah ruled in the Kingdom of Judah. His father, King Ahaz's reign was evil, "He did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God...but walked in the way of the kings of Israel" (2 Kings 16:2-3). This helps us understand King Hezekiah. He had to deal with serious problems for his kingdom was small. Read 2 Chronicles 29:1-11 and 2 Kings 17 and list some of the difficulties Hezekiah faced:

4. Read 2 Kings 18:1-8.

How old was Hezekiah and how many years did he reign?

What was his relationship to God?

Describe Hezekiah's reign for the first years.

5. Despite the nobleness of King Hezekiah, what still happened? (18:9-13)

6. King Hezekiah makes us conscious of a very important truth in life. Use the following passages to answer the questions found below. (Psalm 6; Revelation 3:19; 1 Corinthians 11:32; Hebrews 12:9-10)

When does the Lord chasten us?

What should be our comfort?

What is the purpose of God's chastening?

What is the end purpose for which God corrects?

7. Tell how you look at any difficulty that arises in your life.

8. What temptation did the Assyrians place before the people of Judah? (18:29–35)

Read 2 Kings 19:1–8. How did King Hezekiah react to the blasphemy of the Assyrian?

9. What is the significance of the sackcloth according to these passages:
2 Samuel 3:31; 1 Kings 20:31; Esther 4:1; Jonah 3:8?

10. Who was the counselor for King Hezekiah? (19:1–2)

What request did the king make of the prophet?

What assurance was the prophet able to give the king?

11. Read 2 Kings 19:14–19.

What do the words he “spread it before the LORD” imply? _____

What is the major request that King Hezekiah makes of the Lord?

12. In your own words, tell all that happened in response to King Hezekiah’s prayer. (19:35–37)

13. Read 2 Kings 20:1–11. Hezekiah was still a comparatively young man.

What is about to happen to him? _____

What do the words of the prophet Isaiah mean to you?

Why could Hezekiah honestly make his request for a longer life?

How did the Lord answer the prayer of the king?

What sign did the Lord give Hezekiah to show His mercy?

14. What great event is foretold in 2 Kings 20:17?

15. Second Chronicles, Chapters 29–32, tells us more of the activities of King Hezekiah. List briefly some of his deeds as found in these chapters.

16. Describe Hezekiah's death according to 2 Chronicles 32:32–33.

17. What did you learn from the life of King Hezekiah that you will attempt to incorporate into your life?



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The attitude that King Hezekiah displayed in his worship of the Lord is a clear sign of his complete trust in the Lord.



KING HEZEKIAH – WITH GOD’S BLESSING

A young couple came out of the Ozark hills to be married at the home of a minister. They stood nervously as he read the vows. When the young man was asked if he would love, respect, and cherish his wife, he replied, “Well, preacher, I’ll just do the best I can.” What more could he do? What more can we do?

We are conscious of our need to serve the Lord. Since Jesus Christ died for us, we are to live for Him. Jesus is constantly inviting us to come to Him, but always there follows the command, “and now go.” Through Jesus, we are saved from the sins of yesterday, but at the same time, we are sanctified for service to Him today and tomorrow. We Christians serve for the good that we can do, and not for the praise that we will receive. A Christian is never to boast of his service and sacrifice.

We are being introduced in this lesson to a man who makes us conscious of what it means to serve the Lord. While this man received guidance and encouragement from the prophet Isaiah, he, in turn, was a real inspiration to Isaiah who was working in a very difficult time. Our man is the good King Hezekiah.

This man stands out for us because he was a rarity, different from the many kings who had preceded him, all of whom were in the line of King David and King Solomon. Most of these kings, rulers of God’s chosen people, were

not only bad examples to their people, but in most cases did not even believe in the God around whom the life of these people centered. We are talking here of the kings of Judah, for all of the kings of Israel were wicked.

King Hezekiah did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his ancestor had done. He was a precious jewel, a man who embodied the ideal of serving the Lord and in whose life we can see the blessings that come from such service. When we think of Hezekiah, we think of the blessings of God.

HEZEKIAH RE-ESTABLISHES THE WORSHIP OF GOD

The Kingdom of Israel (Northern Kingdom) was being ruled by an evil king, Hoshea. The Lord finally allowed the Assyrians to come and carry the bulk of these people into captivity. Hezekiah ascended the throne in a time of turmoil.

The Assyrians who had taken many of the people of Israel into captivity resettled this land with heathen people from Babylon, who didn't know the true God (2 Kings 17:24–25). They intermarried with the native Jews and became the ethnic mix known as "Samaritans" (the name comes from Samaria, the northern kingdom's capital). In time, the Samaritans assimilated some of the Jewish religion, but also kept some of their heathen religion (17:33). Great enmity existed between the Samaritans and the Jews at the time of Jesus.

Young King Hezekiah loved the Lord and was determined to re-establish the worship of God in the temple at Jerusalem. In 2 Chronicles 29:3 we read, "In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them." One finds it difficult to believe that God's people had drifted so far away from the Lord and allowed the temple to fall into disrepair

and disuse. Hezekiah made plans for a grand re-opening. He began by repairing the doors.

But Hezekiah did not stop there. He insisted that the priests and Levites be re-consecrated so they might again do their duties (2 Chron. 29:4–5). They also carried out the accumulated filth that littered the sanctuary. Once the refurbished temple was ready for God's people to worship Him, King Hezekiah called the people together and said to them, "You have now consecrated yourselves to the Lord. Come near; bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the Lord" (29:31). He even wrote letters to the scattered people everywhere, encouraging them to keep the great feast of Passover so that they might remember how good the Lord had been to them (30:1). You can read his words to them in 30:8–9. The result was that the people of Judah were drawn together and God could bless them (30:12).

What a joy it is for us, who are God's people today, to hear how this great man of God prized the opportunity to worship the Lord. Can we count any sacrifice too great for the privilege of doing the same? As we read in the first Psalm, "Blessed is the man... [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1–2). Jesus said, "Blessed... are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28). One of the avenues God provides for His blessing is a willingness on our part to hear the Word of God. How can people willfully cut themselves off from that Word, refuse to hear it, and then complain that God is unfair when they do not receive blessings from Him?

What happened in the life of this great king spread joy among his people. Listen to these words in 30:26: "So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem."

"For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand." God is leading our life step-by-step. He intends that we spend eternity with Him in heaven. He guides us, therefore, on the path that is going to bring us there.



HEZEKIAH'S VICTORY OVER HIS ENEMIES

The attitude that King Hezekiah displayed in his worship of the Lord is a clear sign of his complete trust in the Lord. Soon afterward King Sennacherib of Assyria invaded the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18:13). He began to trouble God's people. So King Hezekiah prepared his people against this ungodly king. He spoke to them, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him" (2 Chron. 32:7).

King Sennacherib finally besieged the city of Jerusalem, and the situation became desperate (2 Chron. 32:10). The people began to starve. It was then that this great man of God went to the temple (2 Kings 19:14) and spread out the whole situation before the Lord. He cast himself down on his face before the Lord. He pleaded and begged for his people, that God would deliver them from the hand of this ruthless enemy. Read his prayer in 19:15–19.

Such complete trust in God could not be misplaced, and it was not. First, the prophet Isaiah came to assure Hezekiah that the Lord had heard and would answer his prayer. Then an angel from heaven slew the whole army of the Assyrians, 185,000 of them! Sennacherib had to flee to his home in shame, and there he was murdered by his own sons. The threat to God's people was ended. Why? Because Judah's king had put his complete trust in the Lord who gave Israel the victory (2 Kings 19:34–37).

There is much here for us to consider. All of us need to believe that our lives are completely in God's hands, and that we must trust Him absolutely. We need to read Psalm 95 frequently: "For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand." God is leading our life step-by-step. He intends that we spend eternity with Him in heaven. He guides us, therefore, on the path that is going to bring us there. We are not all going to walk the same path through life. Some will have to walk through dark valleys, while others will need to climb high mountains. But all the while, the Lord promises to guide our steps. Do you believe that? Are you ready to trust Him completely? If you are, you will find that it will happen for you as it did for God's people. At the proper time deliverance will come. How wonderful it will be that day when we stand at His right hand, lift up our heads with joy, and hear Him say to each of us, "Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21)!

This lesson is preaching a special sermon to our nation today. Our nation began by putting her trust in the Lord, else we could never have won our independence. When the leaders of our nation gathered to form a new government and to write the Constitution, they expressed their complete trust in the Lord, and their determination to follow the principles which they knew were acceptable to Him. God has blessed our nation as He has blessed no other nation in history. Our motto still is “In God we trust.”

Sad to say, we have seemingly lost a good deal of this spirit of trust in the Lord. Today it appears that we put too much reliance upon ourselves, our wisdom, our ingenuity, our resources, as though those things guaranteed prosperity. We see this spirit in the selfishness and spirit of entitlement that is everywhere in evidence. Since people do not trust God anymore, they have gotten to the point where they trust no one. There can be no real blessedness under such conditions. King Hezekiah was blessed and prevailed against his enemies because in his trust he said, “So now, O Lord our God, save us, please, from his [Sennacherib] hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone” (2 Kings 19:19).

HEZEKIAH’S LIFE IS SPARED

One more thing about this great king should be meaningful to us. After the experience of the deliverance of his people from the Assyrians, the Lord blessed Hezekiah with great wealth and honor. He was loved by his people and respected by all the neighboring nations.

In the midst of all this, while he was comparatively a very young man (39 years old), he suddenly became seriously ill with a sickness that was terminal (2 Kings 20:1–2). The Bible indicates that he was at the point of death. The Lord even sent the prophet Isaiah to him to prepare him for death. The prophet spoke these significant words, “Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover” (20:1). These are words that we need to take to heart every day of our lives, for we do not know when our earthly lives will come to an end.

Why would the Lord want to take this good king away from his people at such an early age? Was it to spare him the heartache caused by these rebellious people? It is an age-old question we still must face. We have to content ourselves with the answer the Lord gave many years ago through Isaiah, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

What did this great man of God do at this point? Exactly what every child of God should do. He went in prayer to Him who alone is able to help. He begged for his life, and while at first glance his prayer (20:3) may seem boastful, we should not look upon it that way since we know the character of the man. Remembering the kings that had preceded him, and what they had done to the people by their poor leadership, Hezekiah reminded the Lord of what, by His grace, he had been able to do for them. It was a simple prayer of faith.

God has blessed us by bringing salvation and the forgiveness of our sins to us through His Son. We are the children of God solely because of what Jesus has done for us.



Before Isaiah left the court of the king, the word of the Lord came to him saying that he should return to Hezekiah to tell him the Lord had heard his prayer and seen his tears, and that He would heal him. God also said He would add fifteen years to his life and that his people would dwell in safety while he was king.

Isn't that heart-stirring? Does God hear prayers? Does God answer them? Indeed, God answers every prayer that is spoken in faith (Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24; James 5:16). He answers in His way, in the way that He sees to be the best. The answer may sometimes be "No," but it is still an answer, and our faith has to tell us it is the best answer (2 Cor. 12:8–9). God also answers all prayers at the time that seems best to Him. We so often pray today and expect to receive our answer today. Often the Lord delays a little longer possibly because we have not learned the lesson that He wanted to teach us. We recall the words of Jesus to His mother at the wedding of Cana, "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). He did not imply that He would not help, but that the time for his help had not yet come. In this connection, you might also look at Isaiah 54:7–8. God gives us His answer when we are ready for it, and when we have learned to put our trust in Him.

Evidently, Hezekiah needed that lesson which he learned out of this illness. With the great blessings that God bestowed upon him (2 Chron. 32:27–30), Hezekiah became guilty of the thing to which we so easily succumb. A certain amount of pride and self-attainment came into his heart and he was forgetful of who it was who had given him his blessings (2 Chron. 32:31).

CONCLUSION

Would you agree that we need the lessons that are taught us from the life of the godly King Hezekiah? That is especially true when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, our Savior. God has blessed us by bringing salvation and the forgiveness of our sins to us through His Son. We are the children of God solely because of what Jesus has done for us. But it is easy for us to imagine that it was our doing which made it all possible. The Lord sometimes must "slap our wrists" so that we will once again turn fully to Him. Let us praise God for all the blessings that come to us. With them, He opens doors of service to Him, which become a source of joy.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

JONAH

Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you read the four chapters of the book of Jonah.

Review

1. What impression did you gain concerning King Hezekiah?

2. What qualities in Hezekiah might you be able to apply to your life?

Jonah 1

3. Find the city of Nineveh on a map. In what country was this city and about how far was it from the city of Jerusalem?

4. What was God's instruction to Jonah? How did Jonah respond?

5. How did the Lord show Jonah that He was serious in His desire concerning the city of Nineveh?

6. Relate the incidents aboard the ship by describing:

Jonah's attitude _____

The seriousness of the situation _____

Who was guilty _____

Jonah's suggestion _____

The people's prayer _____

7. How did the Lord show that He had not forsaken Jonah?

Jonah 2

8. How did Jonah show that he had not completely forsaken the Lord?

What words of dedication does Jonah speak?

What is his concluding statement?

What does this statement mean for us?

How did the Lord answer the prayer of Jonah?

9. What prophecy did Jesus make about Himself using this experience of Jonah? (Matthew 12:39–40)

Jonah 3

10. How did Jonah respond to God’s second command?

11. How is the size of the city of Nineveh described?

12. State Jonah’s message to the people of this city and the miraculous response.

13. How did Jesus explain such an occurrence (Matt. 19:25–26) and how is this an encouragement to us?

14. How did the people of Nineveh show their change of heart?

15. What was the king’s reaction and proclamation? Why?

16. Give God’s response to what happened in Nineveh.

Jonah 4

17. Give Jonah’s response to God’s action. Why did Jonah react in this manner?

What did Jonah even ask the Lord to do?

18. How did the Lord teach Jonah an important lesson of compassion?

19. What does the book of Jonah teach us about our God?

20. Summarize Matt. 5:43–48. How can you apply this text to your life?



GREAT PEOPLE

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

JONAH

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The Lord does not give up on us. He does not stop us from going our own way, but He uses many ways to let us know when He opposes the way we are going. He allows trials and tribulations to come into our lives hoping that we will turn and walk in His way.



JONAH – A MAN ON A MISSION

One thing from which most suffer is a lack of faith. We have depended too much upon our cleverness and ingenuity and now we are afraid of the things the human mind has brought into existence. What we need today is not only to turn to God by accepting Him as a divine being, but also to surrender ourselves completely to Him, to His will, and to His plan for our lives.

What is faith? The writer to the Hebrews answers, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11.1). Phillips Brooks simply used the five letters of the word FAITH and came up with this definition, “Forsaking all, I take Him.” A missionary who was trying to translate the Gospel of John into the Swahili language of Africa could not find a word to express our word “believe.” He took the problem to a native Christian who suggested, “To hear in my heart.”

What a beautiful definition of faith — “to hear in my heart.” To hear the assurances that our heavenly Father has given us through His Son Jesus Christ! What comfort to hear Him say, “Go in Peace, your sins are forgiven.” What joy when we hear, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” What strength there is in my heart when by faith I hear, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Does all this not speak to our hearts and bring confidence to us? “I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”



Faith is not the assurance that no evil will befall us. Rather it is the guarantee that no evil will ever defeat us. Sorrows come to all, whether they are faithful followers of the Master or not, but the Christian knows that when he has placed his life into the hand of God he will come through every experience victorious. No matter how difficult the trial may be, the Christian can smile through his tears.

How empty life is without faith! Someone has said that without faith we are like a stained glass window in the dark — no value, no beauty. But with faith in our hearts, we have the Light of the world glowing in us and this gives glory to our living as that Light reflects and touches the lives of others.

We need to know this about faith because of the great lesson we have before us. We are going to examine the well-known story of the prophet Jonah, which some people sneeringly call “the big fish story.” We will not speak of it in that light. We are going to study about A MAN ON A MISSION. We are going to look at the life of Jonah as a drama in four acts. In this drama, a man of faith is called to act on that faith and obey the call of the Lord.

ACT I

JONAH RUNNING FROM GOD

I don't know what your mission in life is, but I am sure that the Lord has placed you on earth for a purpose. He has given you a mission. I think all of us are here because the Lord wanted us to do something for the good of humanity. We may not follow through and do it, but we are here for that purpose.

I can just hear the wheels turning as some of you are asking, “For what purpose has God put me on this earth?” I don't know, but I feel sure that the Lord has in some way indicated it to you. The important question is: what are you going to do when God places the opportunity before you to render the service He has in mind for you?

God said very clearly what Jonah's mission was to be: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it” (Jonah 1:2). How did Jonah respond to

this instruction that the Lord gave him? Following his own will, he was not about to go into the capital of the great enemy of the Jews and encourage them to repent of their sins lest the Lord not destroy them. That is exactly what he hoped the Lord would do — destroy these people!

So how did he react to this mission? He ran away from God, for he hated these people. He got into a ship to sail in the opposite direction from the one the Lord wanted him to take. Do you think that was an unusual reaction? How many times does a pastor feel guided by the Lord to speak to a certain person about some task in the church, for which this person is well qualified, only to be turned down cold? From that time on, that person does not seem to have the “glow” he once had. This could be a cover-up so he would not be asked again to render a service for the church. Such a person is following Jonah in running from God.

ACT II

JONAH RUNNING TO GOD

A terrible storm arose on the sea endangering the ship in which Jonah was fleeing from God. The situation became so bad that it appeared the ship would be lost. Everyone started praying to whatever god he knew. The cargo of the ship was thrown into the sea to lighten the load. Through all this Jonah lay fast asleep in the hold with his conscience bothering him not one bit. Somebody awakened him and told him that he should also call upon his God. For the first time, Jonah began to realize that he could be the cause of the tempest.

When their prayers were not answered, the mariners were suspicious that there was a jinx on the ship. They cast lots to determine who was responsible. Jonah could have told them in advance. You can be sure he was not surprised when the lot fell upon him. Jonah then confessed what he had done and acknowledged that his God was the One who had made heaven and earth.

Jonah suggested that their only hope of salvation lay in casting him overboard. Before the men threw Jonah into the sea they called upon his God and asked Him not to punish them for what they were about to do. They

recognized that God was in charge. They cast Jonah into the stormy sea and, at once, the sea was calm.

Jonah was in the sea and the men were not about to take him back aboard the ship. Surely he would perish. But God's mission for Jonah was not yet complete. Jonah was still His man. The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. There is no reason for us to speculate on what kind of a fish this was, or if there is a fish that is large enough to swallow a full-grown man. Our Bible simply tells us that God prepared this miraculous fish in whose stomach Jonah found himself. We remember again that, "nothing will be impossible with God." It was while Jonah was in the stomach of the fish that Jonah ran back to God. He confessed his perversity and promised to go on God's mission. You have his prayer in Chapter 2. He describes the seriousness of his situation and his turn to the Lord for rescue. Then Jonah makes his dedication and ends with the song of triumph: "Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (Jonah 2:9).

The Lord does not give up on us. He does not stop us from going our own way, but He uses many ways to let us know when He opposes the way we are going. He allows trials and tribulations to come into our lives hoping that we will turn and walk in His way. Maybe we really need to look at our lives and analyze them with this in mind. Could it be that things are not going well because we have refused to walk the way God has indicated to us? Does He have a mission for us, and have we failed to accept that mission? This needs to be a day of confession for us too.

ACT III

JONAH RUNNING WITH GOD

God allowed that great fish to spit Jonah out upon the dry ground. This too indicates to us that this was a miracle fish. What other fish would beach itself and spit out what it had swallowed! Jonah at once set out for Nineveh and arriving there, he walked through the streets of this huge city. He spoke plainly as he told the people how terrible they were and what

would surely happen to them unless they turned in repentance to the Lord.

Jonah's preaching was very effective because the Holy Spirit was working through him and used the words he spoke to bring about a complete change throughout the city. The people from the king down repented, turned to the Lord, and were forgiven (Jonah 3:5–6). Even the animals wore sackcloth! The words that the king speaks are very significant, "Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish" (Jonah 3:9). These words should be noted by all people so that the assurance of God's blessing may rest upon them. The whole picture reminds us that Jonah was now running with God.

If we today would pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to walk in God's ways, we might experience something as dramatic as Jonah did. What a strange feeling must have come over him when he saw the mighty king of Assyria sitting there in sackcloth and ashes because he had humbled himself before the Lord.

We will have to go our own way to Nineveh, that is, to go where the Lord calls us. This may be some assignment that is made through our church. It may not mean that we have to leave our home but that we will have to change the pattern of our lives. It could even be that the challenge that the Lord directed to us is no longer there because we have been found sleeping in the ship. For that reason, we may have to go to the Lord once again and ask Him to give us a new direction and challenge. But if we do, He will direct us.

Very likely, you can think of something right now that you know needs to be done. The task will vary with each individual, for the Lord opens our eyes to see what He wants us to see, because He has a variety of things in mind that need to be done. He also knows which individual can best do every task. Today is His day. Today is the day when He is saying

to us, “Arise and go to Nineveh, and do the thing that you know needs to be done. Don’t look for excuses anymore.”

ACT IV

JONAH RUNNING AGAINST GOD

You would have thought that Jonah would have been overjoyed when he saw how effective his preaching had been; how the Holy Spirit had used the things he said and turned the hearts of the people to God. But, no, the final scene shows Jonah sitting at the entrance of his tent where God has allowed a vine to grow over the canopy of the tent so Jonah had shade. All the while he is complaining to God, for instead of destruction, salvation had come to the people of Nineveh. In fact, Jonah is so disgusted with the unspeakable mercy of God that he asks the Lord to take away his life (Jonah 4:3).

God wants to teach Jonah, and us, a lesson. The Lord caused a cutworm to eat the plant whose shade Jonah is enjoying, and then Jonah really became an angry man. God told Jonah that he was feeling the way the Lord might be inclined to feel under other circumstances. In Jonah’s case, his feelings were directed toward a very insignificant plant, which as Jesus reminded us is here today and gone tomorrow. How different the feelings of God are for they are directed toward people who have immortal souls and will live forever. They are either redeemed and saved or condemned and lost. Could Jonah not see why God would pity all the people in Nineveh and seek to save them (Jonah 4:9–11)? Jonah had to stop running against God.

Yes, it is true that even the best among us often run against God. We set our minds on a certain course, and we are determined that

nothing is going to interfere. Maybe what we have in mind is not what God has in mind at all. Then when things do not work out as we had hoped, we are disappointed. We may even say that we will never do anything for the Lord or His church again. We become full-fledged “Jonahs,” running against God.

CONCLUSION

We need to apply the whole drama to ourselves. Where does the Lord show us what He wants us to do? In His Word, the Bible. Isn’t it at your church that you are being taught the truths of the Bible and are being shown how these apply to your life? Don’t we run away from God when we, for any but the most legitimate reason, stay away from the House of the Lord? Yet when trouble comes into our lives, we so often complain and grumble as though God was not being fair with us. Then we come to God’s House but we still feel resentment and probably end up by saying that church doesn’t do anything for us.

God is saying to all of us today that it is high time each of us turn to His Word to find out what mission He has in mind for us. He wants us to pursue this mission with all our hearts, knowing that thereby we are serving and glorifying Him. And why should we feel this way? Do I need to remind you of the love God has shown to you, especially of the love that you have experienced at the hands of the Son of God? Jesus Christ is your Savior and love sent Him on the way to the Cross to earn forgiveness for all your sins and open wide the gate of heaven to you. That love surely ought to be enough of a motivating force in your life to compel you to want to do anything that the Lord tells you to do, to be People on a Mission.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

JOSIAH

Allow the Holy Spirit to direct you as you examine the life of King Josiah in 2 Kings 22 & 23 and 2 Chronicles 33 & 34.

Review:

1. From your notes, describe the four phases of Jonah's life.

2. What is your personal feeling about Jonah?

2 Chronicles 33:21–24

3. Describe the conditions that preceded the elevation of Josiah to be king.

- _____
4. What was the particular failing of King Amon?

- _____
5. Under what circumstances did the need for a new king come about?

2 Chronicles 34:1–13

6. At what age did Josiah become king and how did he differ from his predecessors? _____

Who did he use as his model? _____

Who are the role models of today's children? _____

7. Mention two things that Josiah did in his dedication to Yahweh.

- _____
8. Describe how the house of the Lord was repaired. How was this financed?

- _____
9. Give the word in verse 12 that describes how the men worked. _____

How would you apply it to your Christian life today?

2 Chronicles 34:14–28

10. What discovery was made during the process of reconstruction? Who delivered this discovery to the king?

- _____
11. What was the king's reaction?

12. Of whom was inquiry made? _____
 What two-fold message was given:
 for the people? _____
 for King Josiah? _____

2 Chronicles 34:29–33

13. List the steps of reformation taken by King Josiah upon finding the book of the covenant in the house of the Lord.

14. According to verse 33, what is the history of the reign of King Josiah?

15. What message comes through to us if we are going to be people of God?

2 Chronicles 35:1–19

16. What purpose would King Josiah see in the keeping of the Passover?

How does 35:6 show us that it was not just a ritual that they kept? Describe some of the things that impressed you in the keeping of the Passover.

2 Chronicles 35:20–27

17. Describe the situation found in verses 20–22.

18. Again, the Bible deals with realities. Do you think Josiah knew that Neco’s words were from God? How do you think Josiah should have reacted?

19. Give the details of Josiah’s death and burial. What phrases in verses 24 & 25 tell us he died in the Lord?

20. Reviewing King Josiah’s life, of what are we reminded in these verses?

Exodus 20:3 _____

Ezekiel 14:6 _____

Psalm 26:8 _____

1 Timothy 6:12 _____

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*Above all, we need to ask ourselves this simple question:
Do I believe that Jesus is my personal Savior?*

KING JOSIAH – BENT ON REFORMATION

There is a correlation between the work of King Josiah and the work of Dr. Martin Luther. Both of them brought about a great reformation. Unfortunately for the Old Testament people of God, the reformation brought about by King Josiah did not have the lasting effect of the one Luther began. We are still appreciating the blessings the Lutheran Reformation has brought to us.

When Luther turned the hearts of the people back to the Word of God, he was doing nothing more than what King Josiah attempted to do many years before. The Lord was able to use both these men for the spread of faith in the true God. We enjoy great freedoms because of Luther's reformation, and we can sense that this freedom also existed for the people of God because of what Josiah did for them. The Word of God was all but lost before the work of these two men. After their efforts, the Word became available to all for guidance and direction.

Reformation in the church has always been necessary because people in the church become complacent and careless. They lose sight of the real purpose for which the church was established by our Lord. As time goes on, it is natural for customs to be added and different shades of meaning to the teachings that are proclaimed. Thus, the church becomes sidetracked. At such times, God produces a leader to draw the church back to the original design. Such was the case at the time of King Josiah.



YOUNG JOSIAH BECOMES KING*2 CHRONICLES 33*

The situation under which Josiah became king was explosive, to say the least. His grandfather Manasseh was the son of the godly King Hezekiah who tried to lead the people in the ways of the Lord. But Manasseh did evil in the sight of the Lord and re-established idol worship in the house of God. However, at the end of his life, Manasseh repented and tried to undo the harm he had done to his people.

When Manasseh died, his son Amon began to rule. Amon was such an evil king and turned the people so far away from the Lord that his servants felt it necessary to rid the land of this king. They conspired against him and assassinated him. They chose as ruler in his place, Josiah, who was then a mere lad eight-years old.

Can you imagine an eight-year-old boy being elected the president of the United States? In a way that might not be too bad because such a president would certainly look at things from an altogether different viewpoint. There probably would be funds available for ice cream, candy and pleasures children enjoy. But as far as the basic problems of the nation are concerned, he probably would not be able to cope with them.

When an eight-year-old boy became King of Judea, we would imagine the land would have suffered complete disaster. He would not have the understanding necessary for the task. One would expect a power struggle among the officials of the land to see who would become the interim ruler for this boy-king. It is surprising to learn that this did not happen and also to discover that Josiah became one of the great kings of Judea. After the long line of wicked

kings that had preceded him, Josiah inaugurated a great reformation in the land that brought God's blessing upon his people.

The example of Josiah needs to become a personal lesson for us. All of us need to do some reforming, for it appears that the bulk of the people in the church today are not very different from the world about them. God does not receive the honor that He should. There is not love for the Lord that there ought to be, and we fall far short in many areas of our life as children of God. This is putting it very bluntly, but unfortunately, it is the truth.

JOSIAH CLEANSSES THE LAND OF IDOLATRY*2 CHRONICLES 34:1-7*

The first step Josiah took in his reform movement was to remove the idols. After he had established his rule, and when he was still only sixteen years old, he set out to rid the land of every form of idolatry. He destroyed altars to Baal, broke idol images to pieces, and burned the bones of the pagan priests. You can imagine the reactions stirred when Josiah's officers went through the land and destroyed the altars and temples dedicated to these gods.

If we want to reform our lives, this is the way we too must begin. We need to look at the things we do, to see what needs to be expunged. Consider the things that stand between us and our God. What about some of our pleasures? Our habits? Let's not attempt to excuse them saying, "Well, that's just the way I am." No, we need to get rid of them for they will keep us from serving the Lord, as we should. We need to pray to the Lord that He will give us the strength to change, for we do not have such strength in ourselves. But it must be done!

JOSIAH REBUILDS THE TEMPLE

2 CHRONICLES 34:8-13

Josiah knew that he could not leave a vacuum, taking away something without putting something in its place. If the people were not to worship the gods to which they were accustomed, they had to have another God to worship, and since the young king was determined to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious ancestor, King David, it was not hard for him to determine which God that needed to be — the Lord Yahweh. In place of the altars and temples that were destroyed, he began the repair of the temple in Jerusalem, which another of his ancestors had erected — King Solomon.

King Josiah selected three very prominent men to supervise the repair of the temple. He was very dependent upon the high priest, Hilkiah, who was all but a forgotten man in the land. Somehow, during this decadent period, the funds that were contributed for the care of the temple had been preserved by the Levites, and were now available for this project. The repair was carefully done with the knowledge that it was being done to the glory of God.

God intended for His people to have the temple as the one central place of worship, for thus they would remain a united people from whom eventually the Messiah would come to bring salvation to His people. Since the Messiah has come, this is not necessary for us today. We do need a place of worship, and we want that to be a place in good repair that honors our God.

Many of us, however, need to repair the House of God in our homes. How many homes still have a time when the family gathers to read the Word of God and to pray? Those of you who had this experience in your youth, when your parents did

have family worship, know now that it was a valuable training. Family worship drew the family together and brought you close to the Lord so you felt that He indeed ruled in your home. Today the House of God in our homes appears to be in sad disrepair and this hurts the spiritual life of the family.

JOSIAH HAS THE BOOK OF THE LAW READ TO THE PEOPLE

2 CHRONICLES 34:14-28

While the temple in Jerusalem was being repaired, Hilkiah came upon the “Book of the Law of the Lord given through Moses” (v. 14). Moses’ writings had almost been forgotten in the land, so King Josiah first had these books read for him. Next, he summoned the people from everywhere to Jerusalem so that they too might hear the reading of the Bible and know what the Lord expected of them. What a blessed undertaking that was! King Josiah thus did not structure his reformation on his own ideas, but upon God’s own Word.

One of the greatest blessings that has come to us as a result of the Reformation is to have the Bible in a language that we can understand. Do we take it too much for granted? God has given us His Word to teach us the things we need to know for our personal happiness and well-being — how we can be right with Him, how we can live peaceably with the people around us, how we can face the troubles of life, what we can expect at the time of death and after. But many of us are not reading God’s Word or studying it as we should. The church offers special opportunities for studies but people pass them by, and then wonder why their life is empty and seems devoid of divine blessings. This is an area where reformation is needed in the church today!

KING JOSIAH AND HIS PEOPLE DEDICATE THEMSELVES TO GOD

2 CHRONICLES 34:29-33

Idols had been destroyed, the temple repaired and the Book of the Law recovered and read. There was a fourth phase to the reformation of King Josiah, and this was important for it personalized the entire effort for every individual in his kingdom. King Josiah, the youthful leader of the people, pledged before all his constituents that he would do what God expected of him. What a noble example he became for his people (34:31)!

Having made this commitment himself, the king then insisted that his people make such a commitment also (34:32). He did not want them merely to listen half-heartedly to what the Lord expected of them and nod their approval. He wanted them to commit themselves to do these things so they would feel the responsibility of rendering obedience to God who had so blessed them.

The church today is going to be what the leaders of the church are, and our families are going to be what the parents are. That is quite a mouthful, but it is true. It is saying something to everyone who is a member of a Christian congregation, especially to those occupying some position of leadership. Are we fully conscious of what it is that the Lord expects of us? Are we really living our religion?

To parents, this is saying the religious life in your home is dependent upon you. The problem in our homes is not so much delinquent children as delinquent parents. How can there be a strong spiritual influence in the home when parents are content to send their children to Sunday school while they stay away from the church? How can the children really learn to love and trust the Lord if parents take no time as a family to pray and to speak about God? Children need to hear their parents praise and thank God regularly for the good things that happen in and around the home. This is surely an area in need of reformation.

So Josiah began with himself, but he did not stop there. He insisted that the leaders of the nation and then all the people also pledge themselves to do what the Lord required of them in His Word. In short, if there is to be a true reformation, it has to come down to every individual — each person must be touched by it.

Every one of us needs to ask himself some very basic questions:

- Do I realize that I am a sinner and that my sins separate me from God?
- Am I truly sorry for my sins?
- Do I believe that unless my sins are forgiven, I can never have a relationship with God or the hope of heaven?

Above all, we need to ask ourselves this simple question:

- Do I believe that Jesus is my personal Savior?

At this point, you are perhaps wondering what is wrong with the writer. We go to church on Sunday, we say our prayers at some time each day, we lay aside something as a gift to the Lord each week, and we are kind and helpful to other people. Doesn't that make us Christians? Doesn't that please God? Can He think evil of us when we are people like that? You see how easy it is for us to be sidetracked. We forget that it is only because of Jesus and what He did for us. He carried our sins to Calvary and died as a punishment for us, and then rose again to assure us that the debt of our sin was fully paid. How often we need to be reminded! How often we need to ask ourselves whether we really believe it! The devil is always there to whisper doubt into our ears.

How about the next questions:

- Am I ready with the aid of the Holy Spirit to try to improve my life in accordance with the will of God that I discovered through my personal study of His Word?

So Josiah began with himself, but he did not stop there. He insisted that the leaders of the nation and then all the people also pledge themselves to do what the Lord required of them in His Word. In short, if there is to be a true reformation, it has to come down to every individual — each person must be touched by it.



- When God points out to me that there are things in my life that need to be changed, am I willing to make those changes?
- Am I ready to listen to the Lord and to obey Him?

These are vital questions because it is important that we live our faith.

In order to confirm all that he had tried to bring about in the lives of his people, King Josiah re-established the keeping of the Passover, a celebration that God had given to his people to make them aware of their great heritage (2 Chronicles 35). As you read the description of that celebration, you sense it had tremendous meaning for the people. The Passover had never been celebrated like that since the days of Samuel (v. 18). This is just another reminder to us of the zeal of Josiah in leading his people back to God.

THE DEATH OF JOSIAH

2 CHRONICLES 35:20-24

Peace reigned in the land and it was a time of blessing. Then, however, the old evil foe reared his head, and Josiah was involved in a war that was not at all of his doing. The king of Egypt waged war on some of Josiah's allies and he felt compelled to go to their assistance. In the battle, he was mortally wounded. With great sorrow, his people laid him in his tomb at the tender age of thirty-nine, thus ended the noble reign of this godly king. It is interesting to note that the prophet Jeremiah was active at this time and lamented the death of Josiah.

CONCLUSION

Let's review the four phases of reformation that King Josiah inaugurated for the good of his people that we may apply to our lives:

1. He removed the hindrances to a true worship of God.
2. He reconstructed the temple as a place of worship for his people.
3. He instructed his people in the Word of God.
4. He demanded a personal dedication of all his people.

If we follow this in our lives, we will open the door so Jesus' love can come into our lives and direct us along His paths.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

ISAIAH

Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to understand and apply the passages in Isaiah that we'll be studying.

Review

1. What was the one thing that Josiah desired above all else for his people?

List four things that he did.

Isaiah

2. List several facts about the prophet Isaiah as found in Isaiah 1:1.

3. Read Isaiah 1:4 and 1:18. With what two basic truths does Isaiah begin his book?

4. Read Isaiah 4:2. The prophet uses many pictures. Try to discover what he means by the branch. See Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 3:8–9; and 6:12–13.

5. Read Isaiah 6:1–8. Describe the vision Isaiah had. What request was made and what response was given?

6. Read Isaiah 7:14. What glorious truth does Isaiah reveal to us?

7. At what time of the year are the words of Isaiah 9:2, 6–7 read in many churches?

8. Read Isaiah 12. Of what comforting truth does Isaiah remind us in this short chapter?

9. Read Isaiah 26:19. Look up John 5:28–29 and John 11:25–26. Based on these passages, what comfort can you bring to a person who has just lost a loved one?

10. List facts gleaned from the following references:

Isaiah 28:16–17

Matthew 21:42

Acts 4:11

Ephesians 2:20

11. Read Isaiah 35:3–6, 40:1–8 and Matthew 3:3. Who is Isaiah speaking about and what will be the impact of his message?

12. Read Isaiah 42:6–8, 43:1–4 and 46:4. Find several reasons the child of God is comforted by these verses.

13. Isaiah 53. Please read this entire chapter with care. It is always read in Lutheran churches on Good Friday. Two pronouns are repeatedly used in this chapter. List them and summarize the chapter in your own words.

14. Express the promise found in Isaiah 54:10.

15. Isaiah 55:1–11. Give an important truth from each of the following verses.

v. 1

v. 6

v. 7

vv. 8–9

vv. 10–11

16. Isaiah 61:1–2 reads almost as though it were an eyewitness report of the ministry of Jesus. List three activities of the public ministry of Jesus.

17. What was helpful to you in this week's lesson?



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Isaiah knows of but one thing that can bring comfort to his people, and comfort they need, so he proceeds to bring that comfort by some breath-taking prophecies concerning the coming Messiah.



ISAIAH – VISION OF ISAIAH

It is always possible to find something to complain about, things we would like to see changed. As a rule, we are not able to make many changes. However, there are many wonderful things happening all around us in which we can become involved and gain a wholesome outlook on life. We should be positive and optimistic. Good can come out of any situation.

The world may have pleasure, but only the Christian has joy. This joy comes to the Christian because he is under the blessing of God. While many people wait for the blessings of God to come to them, the Christian goes to where those blessings may be found. Joy, then, is not having our way, but God having His way in us. We can find rest and relaxation at the beach or at a park on a vacation trip, but we can only find joy in Jesus!

THE MAN ISAIAH

Isaiah was a man who likely found great joy in his life. He was one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. We are told little of him except that his father was Amoz and that he worked in the Kingdom of Judah during the reign of four kings, climaxed by his ministry to good King Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1–3). Like John the Baptist, he remains in the background while the One of whom he speaks becomes ever more important to us.

Isaiah is called the Evangelist of the Old Testament. As you read his book, it seems almost as though Isaiah, though he lived more than 700 years before the time of Jesus Christ, must have been one of those fortunate people who

was a constant companion of the Lord. Not only does he describe with great clarity things that occurred in the life of Jesus, but he often speaks of these things as though they had already been accomplished because he was sure they would be.

As you read the book of Isaiah, you cannot help but feel that here was a man who had real joy in his heart. Here was a man completely at peace with the Lord and with himself; here was a man who could face the problems of life with absolute calm because he had that wonderful hope of eternal life in heaven. This is rather amazing when we realize what kind of life he had.

The prophet Isaiah served the Lord for fifty years in the Kingdom of Judah under four kings. It is believed that he himself was of royal blood, and that his father was a brother of King Amaziah. For that reason, he could have had a very easy life, as many did, by simply being a hanger-on at court. However, he was an ambitious man and one who was very dedicated to the Lord. God called him to be His prophet in an age when his clear witness was crucial. He also had a wonderful ability to express himself in writing. Isaiah is the book most often quoted in the New Testament. Jesus cited Isaiah frequently and held him in high esteem.

Isaiah faithfully pleaded with his people to turn from their sins, and to accept the forgiveness that would come to them through the Savior whom God would send. This faithful prophet had to suffer much abuse from his people and, according to Jewish tradition, was sawed in half during the reign of Manasseh. He could well be included with the prophets mentioned by the writer to the Hebrews (11:37). We intend to share with you THE VISION OF ISAIAH, for it surely will strengthen us in our faith.

PASSAGES POINTING DIRECTLY TO THE COMING MESSIAH

Isaiah 7:14. “The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Some have claimed this passage speaks only of a young woman in Isaiah’s time. We believe the Lord intended much more when He imparted this vision to Isaiah, a vision that would have both a “near” and a “distant” fulfillment. The Hebrew word *almah* used here occurs six times in the Old

Testament and each time it refers to a young woman of marriageable age who is still in a state of virginity. While Isaiah points to a young virgin girl in his own day as a “sign” to King Ahaz (the “near” fulfillment), the Evangelist Matthew understands this woman to be a type of the Virgin Mary, whose miraculous conception is carefully recorded for us by Matthew himself (Matt. 1:18–23) and Luke (Luke 1:30–35). This is the distant (and greater!) fulfillment. This wondrous child will be Immanuel, which is interpreted “God with us,” or God come down to earth to dwell among us as our brother and our Savior.

Isaiah 9:6. You have probably heard this passage read on many a Christmas. There is no question as to whom Isaiah refers to in this “Child” that is born. The prophet speaks as though he actually stood in the stable at Bethlehem and viewed the tiny baby surrounded by the glory of heaven, the angels, and the special star! Note the description that is given of this Child, especially the phrases “the Mighty God,” “the Everlasting Father,” “the Prince of Peace” (John 14:27).

Isaiah 12:2. This lovely passage has been set to music and employed as the Old Testament canticle in the “Service of Prayer and Preaching” (LSB p. 261). As you read this verse, you can feel the fervency of the faith of Isaiah. He saw the salvation of mankind as an already accomplished fact, for he knows that God will keep His promise and that the Savior will come.

Isaiah 26:19. Confident of his salvation, with his eyes firmly focused on the coming Savior, the prophet can have the same faith we have, namely, that there will be a resurrection from the dead and that, for those who believe, this will be a time of rejoicing. To think that Isaiah knew and believed this for so many years, long before Jesus came, died, and rose again! There was no question in his mind that death was for him the gateway to heaven because of the Savior God would send.

Isaiah 40:1, 3–5, 9, 11. Isaiah knows of but one thing that can bring comfort to his people, and comfort they need, so he proceeds to bring that comfort by some breath-taking prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. At once, we recognize the “voice in the

wilderness.” It is John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Savior (Matt. 3:3). Again, remember these words were written more than 700 years before the coming of our Lord. Matthew tells us that John the Baptist spoke these very words in referring to Jesus. Remarkable! The prophet knew that when this Savior would come into the hearts of men, all obstacles to a peaceful relationship with God would be removed; neither valley of gloom nor mountain of sensual pleasure can then come between our God and us. It is as John tells us, “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

In verse 9, Isaiah makes us conscious that the work of our redemption and our return to God is all God’s doing, and for this reason, we should magnify Him. Verse 11 is so precious to us because it is also the New Testament picture Jesus leaves with us concerning Himself. An example is in John 10 where He cares for each of His sheep. His sheep hear His voice and He knows them, and they follow Him and He gives them eternal life.

Isaiah 42:6–7. These are words which are fulfilled very pointedly in the ministry of Jesus. When Jesus was in the synagogue of Nazareth He read this very passage from Isaiah, and then remarked, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). The prophet Isaiah was given amazing vision!

Isaiah 52:7–9. Would to God these verses would be read in our churches at least every three months as a constant inspiration and encouragement for all of us to be diligent in the mission effort of the church. Nothing should give us greater joy than to see the result of the faithful efforts of our missionaries, especially when we know that we have supported them with our gifts and prayers. We can understand now why Isaiah was filled with such inner joy and peace. By faith, he always had before him the vision of the Savior who would “redeem Jerusalem.”

Isaiah 53. This is Isaiah at his best! This chapter makes us realize that the prophet had a perfect understanding of exactly what the Savior would do for all mankind. Isaiah stands in spirit under the Cross as he writes these words. He is looking up at the crucified Savior as he says, “He was despised and rejected by men.” He listens as

he hears the cries of Jesus from the Cross and he says, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities... The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah uses the pronouns “he” and “our,” and leaves no doubt about the perfect redemption that Jesus would accomplish for the entire world. As you read this chapter, it moves you to love Jesus, even as did Isaiah!

Isaiah 60:1–3. Even though these words were written more than 700 years in advance, yet they read as though the life of Jesus has already taken place. In Jesus, the glory of the Lord will be seen by the world, and this glory will be shown to all nations and all peoples. It is from God’s chosen people that salvation will come in the person of the Savior and this Savior will then bring redemption to all nations.

OTHER PASSAGES OF IMPORTANCE IN ISAIAH

Isaiah 1:4, 5, 11, 14, 18. To prepare his people for the Gospel message he wants to bring them, Isaiah tries to awaken a sin-consciousness in them. He tells them that the sickness of sin permeates their whole beings, and that all their own efforts and even the religious rituals God has commanded them to observe can do absolutely nothing to remove those sins. Their only hope is that God may be merciful to them, and the prophet suggests that this is exactly what God has in mind, for He will remove the stain of their sin.

Isaiah 4:2. Isaiah here uses one of the many pictures that he paints of the Savior. The great tree of David has been cut down. Only the stump remains, but out of that stump comes a branch, and that branch is Jesus (Matt. 1:17, 12:23).

Isaiah 6:1–8. This is Isaiah’s call, a vision of heaven with the Lord God sitting on His throne surrounded by the holy angels, whose song of praise resounds. Isaiah sees himself for what he is, a sinful mortal. In his despair, the Lord shows him that his sins can be taken away. Thus, cleansed from sin, Isaiah knows himself called to serve God with his life. This passage applies to all of us sinners that God calls and uses.

Isaiah 11:1–2, 6–7, 9–10. Isaiah continues to use the picture of the branch, varying it here as a stem, and later as a root, with Jesse, the father of David, as progenitor. Isaiah here envisions the kingdom of the Messiah. It will be a kingdom of peace, for the Messiah was to be the Prince of Peace (9:6). The Messiah has peace because of the gifts the Holy Spirit has given to Him (11:2): gifts of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and the fear of God. The same gifts the Holy Spirit seeks to give to us in our Savior.

Isaiah 12. This would be a fine chapter to read as a preparation for Holy Communion, for it has deep spiritual meaning.

Isaiah 25. This chapter bolsters our faith and trust in God. It portrays God in His mercy caring for all who are in need, finally bringing victory over death to the faithful, and ending with a beautiful doxology in verse 9. In Chapter 26:19, Isaiah definitely declares his belief in the resurrection from the dead.

Isaiah 28:16–17. The prophet here uses the picture of the cornerstone which Jesus also used of Himself (Matt. 21:42).

Isaiah 43:1–7. If ever you are discouraged, Isaiah provides a wonderful word of comfort here for you. In verses 10–11, he proclaims that there is only one God, so that all he has said before about God's loving care pertains only to this one God, the God whom he would have his people accept and worship again. Add yet to these words of comfort what the prophet says in 46:4 about old age. Read also the comfort he expressed in 49:13–16.

Isaiah 54:10. This verse is among the better-known statements of Isaiah and reminds us of the eternal character of all of God's promises. We may forget and we may change our minds, but our God remains faithful always.

Isaiah 55:1, 3, 6, 8–9, 10–11. Isaiah is coming to the end of his book and he still has many things to say.

- Verse 1 emphasizes that the gifts of God's grace are completely free, without any merit or worthiness on our part. Come and receive!
- Verse 3 tells us to hear and believe and you shall have eternal life, a gift of God's mercy.
- Verse 6 exhorts us not to delay coming to Him, for this is the day of salvation, as Jesus said in Luke 19:42. The prophet spells this out well for us in 61:1–2.
- Verses 8–9 teach us that we cannot expect God to think and act as we do. His complete knowledge of all things forces Him to make decisions that may be contrary to our way of thinking, but from the heavenly viewpoint, His way is by far the better approach.
- Verses 10–11 state the thought that the Word of God is never proclaimed in vain, but where it is preached it will always bring fruit. What a comforting assurance for the missionary who goes to an unknown area to bring the Gospel to those who don't know it or when we speak to a friend or neighbor.

Isaiah 64:5–8. These words form a fitting close to our study of the many important things that the prophet Isaiah has said to us. We have sinned, God is ready to save, to mold us and use us as the kind of people He wants us to be.

CONCLUSION

We feel certain that you recognize by now that Isaiah was a remarkable man. We rejoice that we have the privilege of hearing him speak to us today. Because of his wonderful evangelical insight into life, he is a man at peace with a real joy in his heart.

Thinking of him, we do well to complete our study of his book with the Lord's declaration:

"But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Is. 66:2).

What an example Isaiah is for us!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

JEREMIAH

Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to understand as you read selected verses from the book of the prophet Jeremiah.

Review

1. After studying your notes, what is your impression of Isaiah?

2. What lesson did you learn from Isaiah that you are going to try to apply to your own life?

Jeremiah 1:1–10

3. To begin, we need to discover some historical facts about Jeremiah. (1:1–10)

What position did his father hold? _____

Under what king did Jeremiah begin his work? _____

Until what traumatic time did he carry on his work? (1:3; 52:27–30) _____

What does the Lord tell Jeremiah about his destiny? _____

What do you conclude about the age of Jeremiah when the Lord summoned him? _____

What strengthening assurance did God give Jeremiah? _____

4. We also want to consider other historical facts of Jeremiah's time. The Kingdom of Israel (Northern Kingdom) was destroyed in 722. Through the many wars that the Kingdom of Judah (Southern Kingdom) fought, it was so weakened that it held only the city of Jerusalem and the area surrounding it. Try to discover what the message was that Jeremiah was to bring to the people. (Jeremiah 2:1–11).

5. Even as the prophet proclaimed judgment upon his people, what was he always able to promise them? (3:12)

How did God plan to carry out His promise? (3:15) _____

How can we apply this to ourselves? _____

6. According to Jeremiah, what happens to us if we persist in sin? (5:25)

7. Read 6:16 and in your own words tell exactly what the prophet is saying here to his people and to us.
- _____
8. Show how the words of Jeremiah in 9:23–24 are necessary for our day.
- _____
9. Apply the words of Jeremiah in 15:16 to yourself.
- _____
10. Compare the people who trust in themselves and those who trust in God as described in 17:5–8.
- _____
11. While Jeremiah was more of a law-preacher than Isaiah, he could also preach the Gospel. In 23:3–6, list what God tells His faithful people.
- God promises _____
- How will He keep them faithful? _____
- What will their situation be? _____
- Who does He promise to send? _____
- What is the name given to the deliverer? _____
12. What wonderful truth does the prophet reveal to us in 23:23–24?
- _____
13. What warning is given in 23:28–32?
- _____
14. We have an historical note in 26:8–11. What was the reaction of the people to the faithful preaching of Jeremiah? How does this compare to our world today?
- _____
- Give the bold answer of Jeremiah. (26:12–15)
- _____
15. Summarize the words found in 29:10–13.
- _____
16. Find the cross-reference for 31:15 in Matt. 2:16–18 and explain the meaning.
- _____
17. What is the new covenant that God will make with His people? (31:31–34)
- _____
19. Read 46:27–28. Why was the Lord so eager to save these people? Genesis 49:10
- _____
20. How would you describe the prophet Jeremiah?
- _____



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The great lesson we want to learn from Jeremiah is the necessity to SUFFER FOR OUR CONVICTIONS. What a timely subject in a world that is confused in its values!

JEREMIAH – SUFFERING FOR CONVICTIONS

The Great Physician, our Lord Jesus Christ, has the medicine to heal all our diseases. He has forgiveness for our every sin, grace for our every trial. But often we are the ones who hinder the healing process. We do that by our slowness to believe and place our trust in Him, and in our readiness to turn to rely on other things first.

Are we building up that kind of resistance in our lives today? Do we actually question the promises God has given us, showing we do not believe that He can make them happen? Are we simply afraid? Are we hampered because there is some unforgiven sin that we have failed to confess before our God? Are there secret places in our hearts in which we are trying to hide some things from Him? Do we feel so self-sufficient that we do not need God and His power in our lives? These are the questions we should ask ourselves regularly.

Any one of these situations can be the reason why the Great Physician cannot reach our hearts with His balm to heal us. But, we can have the assurance that in Jesus all will be well, for He will work out everything for good. A heart given completely to Jesus will find that all obstacles are removed and the Savior can come in and work a beautiful change.

These words are fitting as an introduction to our study of the life of a man who was really a tragic figure, the prophet Jeremiah. The great lesson we want to learn from Jeremiah is the necessity to SUFFER FOR OUR CONVICTIONS. What a timely subject in a world that is confused in its values!

THE TIME OF JEREMIAH

(We are much indebted to the notes in "Halley's Bible Handbook".)

God's purpose in calling Jeremiah was to make a final effort to save Jerusalem and the area surrounding it, which was the remainder of the great kingdom David had established under the blessing of God. Jeremiah carried out his work about a hundred years after Isaiah, who had ended his work at the time of the godly King Hezekiah. Jeremiah began his work at the time of another godly king, Josiah, who was then followed by a series of very wicked kings. Finally came the utter defeat of the Kingdom of Judah and the removal of many of the people into Babylon in the year 586 BC.

Three great powers were striving for world supremacy: Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. For three hundred years, Assyria had been the dominant power, but had now grown weak. In the meantime, Babylon, to the south of Assyria, had gradually become more powerful. In the wings still lurked Egypt, which for many centuries had been a world power and was again becoming ambitious.

GOD'S CALL TO JEREMIAH

CHAPTER 1

It was in 626 BC that God's call came to Jeremiah, a young man who came from a priestly family. His father's name was Hilkiah, which was evidently a very common name in the priestly order. Under Josiah, there was a Hilkiah, and again at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, just to mention two. When the land was divided among the various tribes at the time of Joshua, no land was given to the tribe of Levi, which was the priestly order. They were simply given various cities in which to live. Jeremiah's family lived in Anathoth, which was in the land of the tribe of Benjamin. It was this tribe, together with the tribe of Judah that formed the Kingdom of Judah (Southern Kingdom); the other ten tribes became the Kingdom of Israel.

When Jeremiah was called by the Lord to speak to the people, he was afraid that they would not listen to him because of his youth even though the Lord had just told him that He had chosen him for this purpose even before his birth (1:5–6). It was then that God assured

Jeremiah that He would be with him and would even put the words into his mouth (1:8–9).

The message of Jeremiah was not an easy one to deliver, for it was a message of doom. For twenty years, this prophet faithfully carried out his mission, telling the people that they would not prevail in their battle with the Babylonians. But even as he predicted the defeat of his people, Jeremiah constantly pointed out that if they would repent of their wicked ways, God would preserve them as a people and keep them from utter destruction.

It took real boldness on the part of Jeremiah to encourage the kings of Judah to submit to Babylon because this was God's visitation upon them. He naturally was branded a traitor. When King Nebuchadnezzar came to destroy Judah and carried a great part of the people to Babylon, he spared Jeremiah and allowed him to remain in his homeland.

Once again, the boldness of Jeremiah surfaced. Now he began to witness against the Babylonians saying what a heinous crime Nebuchadnezzar was committing in his capture of the people of God. He predicted that Babylon would also be devastated.

Even after this disaster of captivity, the people who remained behind showed their rebelliousness. They killed the governor who the Babylonians placed over them, and then in fear decided to flee together to Egypt. Jeremiah vehemently warned against this move. His own people then incarcerated him and forced him to go with them to Egypt where Jewish tradition says the people stoned him. Truly, Jeremiah was a tragic figure, and yet he was a man who was willing to suffer for his convictions.

JEREMIAH'S VISION OF THE MESSIAH

While Jeremiah does not present the Messianic message as clearly as did Isaiah, yet it is always there. We need to look at a few of his prophecies concerning the salvation that God was planning for His people.

Jeremiah 23:3–6. Through the destruction of both the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, God's chosen people

were scattered everywhere. Here God promises that He will again gather His people from all parts of the world to live in the Promised Land. Even though the Jews were never again a nation ruled by their own kings, they nevertheless existed as a nation under the domination of foreign nations, such as Greece and Rome.

Now comes the great Messianic promise. From the family of David, their great king, will come a “righteous Branch and he shall reign as king and deal wisely.” No doubt, this statement of Jeremiah contributed, along with others, to the false idea prevalent among Jewish people at the time of Jesus, namely, that David’s heir would be a physical king to restore the glory of Israel. For them, Jesus just did not fit that picture.

Note the name Jeremiah gives to this Branch of David — “THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” We, of course, recognize at once that this could be no one else but our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, holy and righteous.

Jeremiah 30:9–10; 33:15; 46:27–28. These passages are much more general in the promise that is given. But as the prophet condemns the wickedness of his people, he always holds out to them the hope of deliverance. He is very conscious of sin and grace.

Jeremiah 31:15. Here we have a definite reference to the life of Jesus, referring to the slaying of the infants at Bethlehem by King Herod. This verse is quoted in Matthew 2:17.

OTHER IMPORTANT PASSAGES FROM JEREMIAH

Jeremiah gives us a virtual catechism of Christian doctrine in his book. Here is a list of the passages and the truth taught. Please read them and meditate upon them.

- 2:11 Sin of Idolatry
- 6:16 Confessional Attitude
- 15:6 Joy of God’s Word
- 17:5–8 Self-trust over against Trust in God
- 17:9 Our Sinful Nature
- 17:21–22 Keeping the Sabbath
- 18:18 Eighth Commandment
- 22:13 Seventh Commandment
- 23:23–24 Omnipresence of God
- 23:28–31 Faithful Preaching
- 24:7 and 31:18–19 Conversion, an Act of God
- 27:5 God as the Creator
- 31:31–33 New Covenant
- 43:5–6 Personal Dedication

LEARNING FOR OUR OWN LIFE FROM JEREMIAH

We cannot help admiring the prophet Jeremiah because he could have had a life of ease. With his wealth and training, he probably could have found a position of honor with the Babylonian government. But instead, he remained faithful to his convictions, finally paying for them with his life.

The Gospel we proclaim today is not a popular message. People would rather listen to some false gospel that says all you have to do is try to keep the Ten Commandments as best you can, or that you are good and don’t let anyone tell you anything else. The Bible tells people they can’t keep the Ten Commandments at all, because they are inclined to sin, and therefore God has to punish them unless they turn in faith to Jesus and accept Him as their Lord and Savior.

This is hard to swallow. They call it foolishness. They ridicule us for our faith, and call us

simpletons. In many ways they try to make life as unpleasant for us as they can. They ask why we don't forget all this nonsense and simply have a good social life and enjoy ourselves. The temptation is to listen, especially when we are still young and life is stretching out before us. How much easier it would be to follow a creed of worldly pleasure rather than the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus is simply not popular.

Nor is our way of life popular. People cannot see why we are willing to give up so many things that they consider important to real living. When we tell them God has revealed to us that this is the way He wants us to live, they just shake their heads. They may even tell us how sorry they are for us because we are just not living.

But when we are convinced that something is right, something is true, we have to stand up for our convictions. Let's take as an example the whole subject of sexuality. We know that sex in itself is not sinful because it is a creation of God. God made us male and female, and He did this for the joy and happiness of mankind. God wanted to perpetuate the human race through the structure of the family. As a result, God has built into us a sense of what is right and what is wrong about sex. When we become convinced, and especially through our study of the Bible, of what is right and what is wrong, we must stand up for our convictions, even though the whole world seems to be in disagreement with us. This is very difficult, especially for young people.

What should make us willing to "buck" the crowd and stand up for what we know is right? Isn't it the fact that we have come to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ? Doesn't His willingness to endure so much for us give us courage? Can we love our Lord Jesus and then not stand up for what we know is acceptable to Him? Read John 8:48–59.

CONCLUSION

What was it that kept Jeremiah going? Why didn't he wash his hands of the whole thing, go back to his estate, and say, "I tried but you would not listen so

I will go my way and you go yours." He did not do that because Jeremiah knew God's promise. God was going to provide salvation for His people through the Messiah, and if that promise was to be carried out, God needed these people as His people, although they behaved obstinately. Jeremiah stayed with this conviction even though it probably cost him his life.

We may see no results from the faithful witness we give to our Savior. We may see more enmity than acceptance; we may even have to suffer for our convictions. We have seen where young people missed honors that they had hoped for because they would not go along with the loose morals of the day. We may lose a promotion on the job because we insist on maintaining the principles of scrupulous honesty. We may not get the office to which we aspire because we will not close our eyes to things that are wrong. But, in the end, standing up for our convictions, we are not going to be the losers.

Remember the words, perhaps spoken at the time of your confirmation at the Lord's altar, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). We are looking forward to that crown of life, and for this writer that time may not be long, because we are beyond the stage of three score years and ten. The Lord tells us that if we stand up for our convictions, even though we may have to endure hardships now, we should remember that He has for us the crown of eternal life in heaven. By our faithfulness, we demonstrate to Him that we truly believe it is through Jesus — and through Jesus alone — that this and all other blessings come to us.

Listen yet to these words of Jesus:

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:11–12).

Don't you think it is worth it to suffer for your convictions? Be a Jeremiah!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

ESTHER

You will want to read the Book of Esther and ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what is written.

1. What particularly impressed you about the prophet Jeremiah?

Note: During the time of Jeremiah, the Jews were carried into Babylonian Captivity, 586 BC. They returned in a small number in 536 BC. The Temple was rebuilt from 536–516 BC. Esther became queen of Persia 478 BC and Ezra and Nehemiah were the leaders of God's people after her time.

Esther 1

1. Who was the king at this time and over what area did he reign?

What was it that disrupted the supreme pleasure of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes)?

2. Why did the king feel he needed to deal with Vashti?

Find a statement here that might be "chauvinistic."

Esther 2

3. Despite the previous difficulty, how was the next queen chosen?

What impression are you given of Esther?

What had Esther failed to reveal about herself to the king?

How was Mordecai able to endear himself to the king?

Esther 3

4. Now the archvillain appears on the scene. Who is he?

What did he expect of everyone and who disappointed him?

As a result, what was Haman determined to do?

What approach did he use to the king to bring about his desire?

Esther 4

5. Who became aware of the plot of Haman?

How did he hope to counteract the devilish plan of Haman?

Summarize Mordecai's reply to Esther found in verses 13–14.

How could you apply the last words in verse 14 to your life?

What request did Esther make to Mordecai, indicating she would do her part?

Esther 5

6. Describe how Esther arranged a confrontation with Haman.

The joy of Haman at being singled out in that manner could not overcome his hatred for Mordecai. What order did he then issue?

Esther 6

7. How did the king attempt to deal with his insomnia?

What discovery did the king make?

What advice did the king seek of Haman and what was Haman's reaction?

Esther 7

8. At the second banquet Esther prepared for the king and Haman, what did Esther reveal to the king?

To whom did she point as the adversary?

What was the final end of Haman?

Esther 8

9. Describe the new decisions that the king made.

Esther 9

10. Now enjoying the favor of the king, what did the Jews do?

What final request did Esther make of the king?

How did the Jews commemorate their great victory against their enemies?

What name was given to this festival? _____

Esther 10

11. List a great truth the book of Esther reveals to you about God.

12. Write what you learn from these passages about God.

Genesis 50:20 _____

Psalms 37:5 _____

Jeremiah 29:11 _____

1 Peter 5:7 _____

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May Queen Esther be an inspiration to every one of us not to grumble about our lot in life but rather to regard it as a challenge from God.



QUEEN ESTHER – FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

*God does not lead me year by year,
Nor even day by day;
But step by step my path unfolds,
As He directs my way.*

*Tomorrow's plans I do not know,
I only know this hour,
And Him who bids me walk each step,
Supported by His power.*

*And I am glad that it is so:
Today's enough to bear,
And when tomorrow comes again,
His grace will mend my care.*

*What need to worry then or fret?
My Lord, who gave His Son,
Holds all my moments in His hands
And gives them one by one
Anonymous.*

Let us not live tomorrow today, and be so involved in what tomorrow may bring, that we have no time or inclination to enjoy what God is giving us today. Let us not live six months hence. Above all, let us not fear the prospect of an unknown future. God, the All-Wise, the Almighty, the Eternal, with whom there are no yesterdays and with whom there are no tomorrows



is way ahead of us, and when we reach our own tomorrow, we will find that He is already there.

In the meantime, the Lord is allowing us to live today, because there is something today that He has in mind for us. The Lord nudges us, He prods us, and we are looking way beyond where He wants our eyes to be. The simplest way to put it is to live one day at a time or even one moment at a time.

The Lord is no “respector of persons.” We have not only great men in the Old Testament, but great women too. There was a widow of Zarephath who took the prophet Elijah into her home during the famine. There was that woman who opened her house to the prophet Elisha, whose son he raised from the dead, and Deborah, Israel’s leader. This study focuses fully upon a woman who is an excellent example for us.

In Queen Esther, the lesson God wishes to teach all of us is obvious. Esther assumed her position as queen at a very crucial time for her people. She realized this, and used the opportunity that was given to her to save her people from extinction. Her story is a story for all of us, so that we may recognize that God has placed us where we are, at the time in which we are living, because He has a task for us to do.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Jews were carried into the Babylonian Captivity in 586 BC (Jeremiah 39). Some of them returned from Babylon in 536 BC and the rebuilding of the Temple took place under Ezra (Ezra 3). It was in 446 BC that Nehemiah brought more of the people back and they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2). Esther became queen of Persia in 478 BC and saved her people from a massacre in 473 BC. She lived during the years between Ezra and Nehemiah. The marriage of Esther to the king of Persia resulted in the Jewish people having great prestige in Persia, and very likely paved the way for Nehemiah.

In the case of Esther, we are dealing with a very important historical fact and not just a moral lesson as, for example, in the case of Job. She had much

to do with the deliverance of her people from annihilation during the Babylonian Captivity. If the Hebrew nation had been wiped out of existence some 500 years before our Lord Jesus came into this world, that surely would have dealt a blow to the great plan that God had for the salvation of mankind. Esther fit into God’s plan, which paved the way for the coming of the world’s Savior.

ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN

The king at this time was Ahasuerus (Esther 1:1), better known as Xerxes, who ruled Persia 485–465 BC and was among the most illustrious monarchs of the ancient world. After his marriage to Esther, he lived thirteen years, and she very likely lived well into the reign of her stepson, Artaxerxes. As queen mother, Esther no doubt had considerable influence in what happened to her people in Babylon and in Jerusalem.

We see the hand of the Lord in Esther becoming queen at this time. The king had a queen named Vashti (1:9). When King Ahasuerus had a big state dinner and asked her to grace the evening with her presence, she refused. This angered the king because he was a world ruler and expected everyone to obey him. What was more, he saw in the attitude taken by Vashti a dangerous trend in the relationship of wife to husband, which he surely did not want to see happen in his kingdom. He was advised, therefore, to put Vashti aside and to choose a new queen (1:19). The king used the occasion to make a strong point concerning his idea of a wife’s responsibility (1:22).

So the search for the new queen began and agents of the king were sent through the land to search out the young women they felt might be suitable. After undergoing extensive beauty treatments, these were brought individually to the palace so the king might make his choice. Esther won the favor of everyone, including the king, and she was chosen.

The reason Esther was even included among these young women was that her uncle Mordecai had a position in the court of the king. Esther, having lost her parents, was raised by him as his own daughter.

Esther, however, did not reveal her background to the king. Whether this would have made any difference, we do not know. Esther was such a beautiful woman outside and inside that she would have turned the head of anyone. King Ahasuerus knew at once that she would make the perfect queen. The honor and respect he showed Esther indicates she measured up to the highest standard of womanhood as the king saw it. This is why we can benefit by studying this woman. The fact that she and her people were downtrodden did not keep Esther from adorning herself in a way which presented her beauty and the nobleness of her character.

INTRIGUE IN THE COURT

A plot against the life of King Ahasuerus was made by some of the king's officials and this became known to Mordecai, who revealed what was happening to Esther. She then told the king, and when a trial was held the men were found guilty and were executed. The records were preserved in the annals of the kingdom.

At about this time, Ahasuerus elevated Haman to a position in his reign equal to that of prime minister. Haman was a haughty man and insisted that everyone should reverence him, as they did the king. Mordecai, being brought up in the strictest Jewish tradition, refused to do this, which enraged Haman. Knowing that Mordecai was a Jew, Haman was determined to eliminate all these stiff-necked people (3:1–6).

Haman drew up a decree, took it to the king, and persuaded the king to approve his idea of exterminating the Jewish people (3:13). Mordecai discovered what was happening and, knowing he was in no position to go to the king himself, came to Esther and revealed to her the awful thing that had been decreed. She, of course, was shocked (4:4).

Mordecai then spoke the words which are perhaps the most remembered words in the book of Esther (4:13–14). He told her that according to the decree of Haman, even though she was queen, she would not be able to escape. He said that if she did nothing

to change the decree of the king, then certainly God would find some other way to save His people. Mordecai believed that God's will for the redemption of sinful mankind would be carried out and that Esther should not fail in the mission for which God made her queen.

“Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” What a challenge for Esther — for us! We have been brought into the kingdom of God through His grace at this time to be where we are because He has a task for us to do. Do we recognize it? Are we striving to find our task? When the Lord directs us to it, will we be ready to follow through?

Esther's reaction was immediate. She would do it. But she realized that she could not do it by herself. She needed the help of God. So she asked Mordecai to gather all of her people to fast and pray that the Lord would bless her endeavor to save her people (4:16). What a noble example Esther is for all of us! She knew where she needed to turn for help and she hesitated not a moment to do it.

ESTHER MEETS WITH THE KING

Esther knew that she was going to have to approach the king, and, if she did that when she was not summoned, she could be put to death for her rash action. Her only hope was that the king would have enough love for her to spare her life. With a prayerful heart, she dared to go to the king. She also knew that she could not reveal to him in his chambers what it was that was disturbing her, so she invited the king to dine with her that evening. Very cleverly, she included Haman in this invitation. He, of course, was delighted that he should be given preference over everyone else.

When the dinner was in progress, the king knew that Esther had something on her mind but she was not yet ready to reveal it. She merely indicated that it was so pleasant to have had this evening together she would like to repeat it the next evening, to which both agreed. As Haman left the queen's chambers, he

saw Mordecai in the palace gate and Mordecai would in no way indicate that he was aware of Haman's presence. Haman was so enraged that finally his wife suggested he have a tall gallows built and ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai on it. This pleased Haman and he arranged for the gallows to be built (5:14).

On that night, King Ahasuerus was not able to sleep. He ordered that the official records of his kingdom be brought to him. As he was reading these he found written how Mordecai had revealed the plot against the king's life (2:21–23). He discovered that nothing was ever done to show Mordecai his appreciation (6:1–3). The next day the king asked Haman what should be done for someone whom he wanted to honor. Haman thought the king wanted to honor him and so made some very elaborate suggestions. To his absolute dismay, he discovered that it was Mordecai the king wanted to honor and that he was the one who would lead the procession to honor his enemy (6:10).

That evening the king and Haman sat once more at the banquet table of Esther, and now the time had come for her to reveal what it was that had so disturbed her. She began with the words, "Let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request" (7:3). Then she explained exactly what was happening and pointed directly at Haman as the one who was responsible. Haman realized at once that he was in real danger, and he pleaded for his life from Esther, while the king went out in a rage. When he returned, he found Haman actually lying on her couch begging for his life. This so enraged the king that when he learned of the gallows that Haman had built for Mordecai, he ordered Haman be hung on them at once (7:10).

Esther explained to the king about her own nationality and about her relationship to Mordecai, whom the king held in high respect. Since his original order could not be annulled, the king allowed the Jews to arm themselves and to stand in defense of their lives

(8:11). In the meantime, Mordecai had been exalted by the king to the highest possible honor (8:15) and there was great rejoicing among the Jews.

THE AFTERMATH OF THIS THREAT UPON THE JEWS

The first part we would like to forget. The decree that Haman had expedited needed to be carried out, but the king had arranged so the effect of it was minimized. Actually on the day set, the Jews were able to defend themselves so well that their lives were spared and many of the enemies of their nation were killed (9:5). We note that the ten sons of Haman were also hanged (9:13).

The second result was that the Jews inaugurated an annual festival, which they intended to commemorate their great victory. The name of this festival was Purim and Jews today continue to observe it. They exchanged gifts among themselves, made special efforts to care for the poor, and feasted. The guiding figure behind this celebration was Mordecai who had become a powerful influence in the kingdom. God's chosen people were spared, and hope of salvation through the Messiah was still intact.

THE CONCLUSION

The fact that she was a queen and used the opportunities presented to her has caused Queen Esther to be honored by both God and man. Her name is recorded for our remembrance in the Bible while the names of many other queens are forgotten. But more important even than this, she was a child of God who believed the promise of God.

May Queen Esther be an inspiration to every one of us not to grumble about our lot in life but rather to regard it as a challenge from God. May we say to ourselves, that God has brought us into the Kingdom for such a time as this because He has something important for us to do in His Kingdom. Our life and what we accomplish with it is precious to Him. We might do well to read again Romans 12:1–2.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

DANIEL

We need to prayerfully examine the twelve chapters of the 'Book of Daniel and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us in our understanding.

Review

1. From your notes on Queen Esther, give the key verse we need to apply to our lives.

2. What gave Queen Esther the courage to do what she did for her people?

Daniel 1

3. For historical background, we need to know that Daniel was carried into Babylon as a mere youth, even before the Babylonian Captivity, and so was on the scene when the Jews arrived as captives. What was one of the orders King Nebuchadnezzar had given? (Daniel 1:3–4)

4. What was Daniel determined to observe and how was this accomplished? (1:8–16)

5. List the names of the four young captives.

List the gifts God gave them. (1:17)

What extra gift did God give Daniel?

Daniel 2

6. How did Daniel particularly come to the attention of King Nebuchadnezzar?

7. Before Daniel ventured to do what was requested of him, what did he do? (2:19–24)

8. To whom did Daniel witness before the king? (2:28)

9. What was the king's dream?

What was the interpretation?

What did the king finally acknowledge?

Daniel 4

10. Write what the king has to say about God in verse 2.

11. Relate Nebuchadnezzar's dream. (4:5–27)

12. Summarize Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream. (4:19–27)

Of what particular sin does Daniel accuse the king?

What plea does Daniel make to the king?

What promise could Daniel make?

13. How does the sin of pride affect our lives today?

Daniel 5

14. The son, Belshazzar, has succeeded the father as king. In his festivities, how did he offend God?

15. What strange phenomenon suddenly appeared?

16. How were the words of Daniel fulfilled?

Daniel 6

17. Daniel is now serving under the third king. What position did he occupy?

18. Describe the decree of the king, Daniel's reaction, the result and the escape.

Daniel 7

19. Describe the four kingdoms that Daniel saw in his dream.

Daniel 9

20. As a true child of God, what does Daniel acknowledge? (9:4)

21. Who appears to Daniel? Are any of his words familiar to you?

Daniel 10

23. Daniel is serving under a fourth king and again sees visions. What encouragement is Daniel given in 10:19?

24. Compare 12:2–3 with Matthew 25:46 and John 5:28–29. What glorious truth is proclaimed?

25. List some words that describe Daniel.

26. In what ways can we dare to be a Daniel today?



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*“DARE TO BE A DANIEL!” USE
YOUR TALENTS FOR THE LORD!*

DANIEL – USING OUR TALENTS

People were once afraid to take their ships and venture out far out onto the seas. They feared they might lose their direction. When I do that on the streets of my own city, I can only imagine being out there in the water with no sight of land. Then someone invented the compass and now we can sail anywhere.

The voyage of life for many is uncertain and frightening because they have nothing to guide them in the direction they should go. God has given us a conscience, which, if we keep it in tune with Him, will guide us on the right way. But many people have turned away from God so completely that their conscience can no longer serve as a guide.

When we are confused, we ought to ask God to guide us. Out of the Korean War came the story of a wounded Navy pilot who was blinded by his own blood as his Air Force bomber was ripped by gunfire. “I am blind,” he called into his radio, “Someone tell me where I am.” His message was picked up and a calm voice guided him in. The pilot skidded to a safe landing because someone told him the way and he followed the instructions given.

No matter how crippled our ship of life, if in prayer we tell God our needs, we can be sure we will receive the proper instructions to lead us safely to our destination. God has a definite goal in mind for each of us — heaven — and He is going to guide us safely there. This is one of the great lessons we have learned from our study of the Great People of the Old Testament.

“Dare to be a Daniel!” This is the way an old spiritual song begins and it is a challenge we need to hear. We do not think of Daniel as a physical giant who could match strength with Samson or Joshua when it came to a wrestling match. Daniel appears to be more the intellectual type, the college professor. He was probably not a big man, and yet we are encouraged to say, “Dare to be a Daniel!” for this man was a spiritual giant who accomplished great things in his life for the Lord.

We have emphasized our need to witness to people about our religious experiences, especially what it means to us to know and believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. From Queen Esther, we learned that the Lord put us right where we are for the time in which we are living. From Gideon, we learned that we must be sure the Lord is on our side, because then we know we will succeed in our witnessing. Now Daniel stands before us, a man of unusual talents, who used them for the Lord. His life brings us the message, USE YOUR TALENTS FOR THE LORD.

THE TRAINING OF DANIEL

While a mere youth, Daniel was uprooted from his home near Jerusalem and taken forcibly into Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar had instructed the master of his eunuchs to select certain of the gifted young men of the Jews so they might be taken to Babylon and trained to work in the government. Daniel was one of those chosen, together with three other young men of whom we shall learn in due time: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 1).

To be defeated in war and then to be carried into exile to live under completely strange conditions would certainly be enough to cause a person to become discouraged and to forsake his ambitions. Not so with Daniel. He did not like what was going on in his world, but he knew he had been placed on this earth for a purpose. He could not waste his life no matter how discouraging things became. He felt the need to develop his abilities even though he might never be able to use them.

Note the type of young men that Nebuchadnezzar sought (1:4). They were to be physically sound, good looking, able to reason well, knowledgeable about the sciences, and able to stand tall in the presence of royalty. The king knew that he could find this type of young man among the Jews, and he was shrewd enough to know that such young men could be invaluable in the ruling of his kingdom.

With all these talents, Daniel, however, was determined that in spite of the opportunity afforded him; he would not give up the practicing of his religion (1:8). He was particularly concerned about dietary matters since the Lord had given His people some definite rules concerning their food. Daniel made a good impression on the prince of the eunuchs so his wishes for certain food were granted.

These four men enjoyed the blessing of God, and as a result were quick to learn and apply their knowledge (1:17). The Lord looked with special favor upon Daniel, and he was given the additional ability to understand visions and dreams, which would later be very valuable in his service to King Nebuchadnezzar.

DANIEL INTERPRETS NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

The special talents of Daniel were almost immediately put to use. The king had a dream and it was of such a startling nature that it awakened him and he could not sleep (2:1). He summoned all of his wise men to help him with this dream. When asked what his dream was, he ordered them to tell him what it was about. No one was able to help him. This so enraged the king that he ordered all the wise men slain, including Daniel and his friends (2:12–13).

Daniel stepped forth and asked why the decree from the king was so hasty (2:15), and standing in the presence of the king, he asked for time to show the king the interpretation. He then asked his friends to pray for him, and he himself went to the Lord in prayer (2:19–23). Daniel begins by exalting the

Lord, makes his request, and acknowledges that he knows it will be granted. What a model prayer! We should begin our prayers with thanksgiving for blessings already received, and then pray confidently for our needs.

Daniel appeared before the king (2:26) and told him that only the God in heaven, in whom Daniel believed, could help in this situation. God had revealed the dream of the king and its meaning to Daniel. He then told the dream (2:31–35). Daniel's interpretation was that there would be four kingdoms that shall rule the world. The first was the kingdom of Chaldeans over which the Lord had made King Nebuchadnezzar the ruler. The second would be that of the Medes and the Persians with King Darius reigning. The third would be that of the Greeks under Alexander the Great. The fourth would be the Romans under their Caesars. In the end a small kingdom would begin, a stone cut without hands (2:34), the Kingdom of Christ which would become a mighty mountain.

The result was that Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the God that Daniel worshipped and elevated Daniel to the highest office of authority in the land. It was an acknowledgement of how the Lord can bless those who use their talents to serve Him.

But how fickle man is! King Nebuchadnezzar soon forgot about Daniel's God. He set up a statue that would honor himself. We will be speaking of this in our next study. Suffice it to say, it did not please the Lord.

THE TRIAL OF KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Chapter four tells us of another dream the king had. Based on that dream, Daniel foretold that the now mighty king would be humbled until he became as a wild beast in the field. He would live this way until he would acknowledge the Lord as his King and Master. Daniel issued an earnest call for repentance to the king (4:27).

Within a year it came to pass, showing us that the king had not heeded Daniel's call to repentance. One day the king heard the voice of God from heaven telling him that his kingdom had departed from him. Almost immediately, the king became as a wild animal; lived out in the fields, and ate grass and straw. Finally he lifted his eyes to heaven and acknowledged the Lord (4:34) and his kingdom was returned to him.

THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son Belshazzar, who learned nothing from the experience of his father. He was an arrogant king who made a great feast (5:1) to glorify himself. In defiance of God, he used the sacred vessels from the temple, which were dedicated to the honor of God, as cups for his drunken guests,

Suddenly a hand appeared (5:5) and began to write on the wall. Everyone was in shock. What were the words? What did they mean? Once more Daniel was summoned for he was still respected. Once more the answer was given. Before Daniel gave the meaning, he spoke plainly to the king (5:22). He told the king that he had not learned from his father and had not humbled himself before God, so God now had a message for him.

“Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin.” The meaning (5:26–28): God has numbered the days of your kingdom and it is finished. You are not what you think you are. The kingdom will be taken from you and will be given to the Medes and Persians. That very night Belshazzar was slain and King Darius of the Medes and Persians ruled over the land.

DANIEL SERVES UNDER KING DARIUS

Darius decided to rule his vast kingdom through one hundred and twenty princes over whom were three presidents. The head president would be Daniel. As so often happens, there was jealousy. The other presidents and princes knew that the only way they could find anything against Daniel was if they could

somehow use his religion against him (6:1–5). They devised a plan by which they would play on the pride of King Darius. They suggested Darius pass a law that for thirty days, no one would ask anything of any god or man but of the king only, and if anyone disobeyed, he would be cast into the lion’s den (6:7).

Daniel would not obey such an order for his conscience told him that this was wrong. This is just what his enemies were hoping. The disobedience of Daniel was reported to the king. The king knew at once that he had been trapped into making this decree. But he also felt that he could not go back on his word, so Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den. In a surprising way, King Darius expressed the hope that Daniel’s God would preserve him in his great danger (6:16).

King Darius could not sleep that night. Early in the morning, he went to the lions’ den to check on Daniel. He called to Daniel to ask whether his God had delivered him (6:20). Daniel assured him that God had sent a guardian angel who shut the mouths of the lions (6:22). The joy of the king was great; he ordered Daniel brought out of the lions’ den and his enemies cast into the den. The hungry lions at once went to work. King Darius then ordered that throughout his kingdom people should worship the Lord God (6:26).

DANIEL’S VISIONS

The remainder of the book of Daniel gives us the visions that he had at various times. We are merely going to give a simple explanation as we see the meanings.

Chapter 7: Daniel described the four world powers that would rule over the earth (see Chapter 2): the Chaldeans, the Persians, the

Greeks, and the Romans. Daniel knew these visions had important messages and he was very concerned that he learn the meaning (7:15). The key is given in 7:17–18, for in the end all of the kings will lose their power (7:26), and the Kingdom of Christ shall prevail (7:27).

Chapter 8: This vision goes into more detail. The ram with the two horns is the combination of the Medes and the Persians. The he-goat is Alexander the Great. The kingdom of Alexander would be broken into four parts, which happened when he died and his four generals divided the kingdom (into Syria, Egypt, Asia and Greece). The little horn (8:9) is universally accepted as Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria, 175–164 BC, who wrought great havoc for the Jews.

Chapter 9: This chapter begins with a confession of sins on the part of Daniel for his people (9:4–5) and his acknowledgment that God in His mercy will forgive (9:9). The prophet also places the needs of his people before the Lord (9:18–19). The angel Gabriel appears saying he is there to give Daniel an abundance of “insight and understanding” (9:22). In the vision that follows, Daniel is told the period of time until the Messiah comes and is put to death by His people. As always, the Lord uses round numbers; large numbers for the longer period of time and small numbers for the shorter period of time. It will seem long until this deliverance comes, but the time of the Messiah shall be very short. This shall be followed by great desolation for the people of God (9:26).

Chapter 10: This vision takes place at the time of the fourth king, Cyrus, under whom Daniel served. God lifts the veil for Daniel so that he can see what is going on behind the scenes. The forces of good seeking to protect God’s people are at war with the forces of evil, both are trying

The Lord is telling us that we must use every opportunity to learn and grow in spiritual understanding through the study of the Word so God can lead and direct our lives. We must allow Him to rule in our hearts, for then we shall be prepared when our big moment comes.



to control the movements of the nations. The protector of Israel is their guardian angel, Michael (10:13). In the end, God's people will prevail (10:21).

Chapter 11: This chapter contains much historical prophecy that was fulfilled. Following Darius would be three kings of the Persians, and then the fourth, wealthy Xerxes. It is this wealth that would draw Alexander the Great of Greece to conquer Persia. Following Alexander's kingdom, Egypt would again be strong (11:5). In the meantime, efforts were made to unify Egypt and Syria and from this came Antiochus Epiphanes (11:21). There followed a vile age of corruption and deceit in which Antiochus sought to control Egypt but was hindered in this by the Romans. This was in the time of Cleopatra. In his rage, Antiochus took it out on the Jews, profaned the temple (11:31), persecuted the faithful (11:32–33), and defied God (11:36). His end would come with none to help him (11:45).

Chapter 12: Daniel concludes his visions with the assurance that, despite the terrible time of trouble for God's chosen people, deliverance shall come in the end. He brings a beautiful promise of the resurrection and eternal life (12:2–3). In spite of all the calamities, many shall be spiritually cleansed (12:10) and in the end enjoy blessing and eternal rest.

Author's Note: This is a very brief synopsis of these last chapters. I hope that all of you will satisfy yourself only in the comfort of salvation for the faithful which is assured here.

CONCLUSION

Daniel had tremendous gifts from God and marvelous opportunities to use them serving four powerful kings. There are important lessons for us here. The Lord is telling us that we must use every opportunity to learn and grow in spiritual understanding through the study of the Word so God can lead and direct our lives. We must allow Him to rule in our hearts, for then we shall be prepared when our big moment comes.

Let us appreciate the talents God has given us. There are no two people who are exactly alike; no two people who have exactly the same combination of abilities. Praise God for that! God gave us our talents to use for the good of others. Therefore, let us cultivate them and put them to use.

While we certainly are to receive joy from the abilities God has given us, such as in music, art, drama, sports, let us not hoard these talents for ourselves. If we have the ability to sing or play an instrument, how pleased we ought to be when we have an opportunity to use these gifts for the Lord. If we have the ability to paint or write, to act or entertain, what a wonderful thing that we can inspire other people. Behind it all must be our desire to share our faith in our dear Lord and Savior.

Most important of all, it is in sharing our talents that we will find real happiness in life and will feel the satisfaction of having lived a worthwhile life.

“Dare to be a Daniel!” Use your talents for the Lord!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO

Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you read Daniel, Chapter 3.

1. What were some things you learned in Daniel's life that could be helpful to you as you live your life in Christ?

2. Write briefly what the following passages say about your life in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17 _____

John 14:15 _____

John 15:5 _____

Luke 1:74–75 _____

Galatians 2:20 _____

Ephesians 2:10 _____

3. Why are we somewhat surprised at the act of King Nebuchadnezzar recorded in Daniel 3:1? Check back to 2:46:47.

4. How had Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego come to the attention of the king? (2:49)

5. What common weakness of people in authority did the king display? (Proverbs 29:23)

6. Tell what Solomon says about pride in Proverbs 16:18.

7. Give the decree that King Nebuchadnezzar gave to all his subordinates. What would be the punishment for disobedience of this decree?

8. The corollary to pride always seems to be jealousy. In this case, who were the jealous people and of whom were they jealous?

9. See what Solomon also has to say about jealousy in Proverbs 6:34.

10. With what nattering words did the Chaldeans address the king?

11. What do you think was behind the pronouncement against Shadrach and his co-workers?
-
12. Note the difference in how the king reacted to opposition (3:13) and how Daniel reacted when he was accused (6:14).
-
13. What defense did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego offer? Why would the Jews have such a strong stance in this matter? (Exodus 20:3–6)
-
14. Explain why this is an even greater danger for Christians today.
-
15. In his anger, what did the king command? From verses 21–23, list as many details as you can from this scene.
-
16. What fantastic discovery did King Nebuchadnezzar make?
- How many men? _____
- Doing what? _____
- And their condition? _____
17. State the king's next order. Why did someone not just open the door and let the men out?
-
18. What four things were observed about these men when they came forth from the furnace?
-
19. Give the king's answer as to what had caused their preservation.
-
20. What was the final pronouncement of the king upon this whole matter?
-
21. What conclusion must we draw from all of this when we are tempted to do things that conflict with our conscience? Share an experience in which you clearly felt your conscience speaking to you.
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Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego teach us that when we know who the light is, we must let it shine. When we know what is expected of us, we are to do it.

SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO – LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

Regardless of how beautiful the landscape may appear, you cannot appreciate it if your glasses are dirty. You need to have clean glasses so that all the rays of light and color will blend well to make the scenery the joy God intended it to be. Too many people are so busy preparing for the rainy day that they cannot enjoy the sunshine God allows them to have today.

Our point of view, the “glasses” we wear, has a great effect upon the way we look at life. If we are depressed and grief-stricken, then no matter what pleasant things happen to us, we will not be able to enjoy them. If, on the other hand, we feel cheerful and buoyant, the worst catastrophe is not going to throw us.

An illustration of the power of one’s point of view is the story of a man who was observing how a large church was being built. He saw three stonemasons at work. He asked each one in turn what he was doing. The first said, “I’m earning sixty dollars a day.” The second said, “I am setting some stones.” The third said, “I am building a cathedral.” They were all doing the same thing, but obviously, they had different attitudes toward what they were doing. Which one of the three do you think enjoyed his work the most?

Those who “see the light” can more readily “be the light.” Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works



and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Our study of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will examine three men who saw the light of God and let it shine. God’s will for them, and for us, is LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE.

SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO

You would hardly have expected that we would include these three men, better known as the “three men in the fiery furnace,” among the great people of the Old Testament. But if you give their story a fair hearing, you will come to agree they deserve this honor.

These three men were closely associated with Daniel during the Babylonian captivity. Daniel 1 recounts that King Nebuchadnezzar had instructed one of his officers to select some of the more gifted Jewish young men and bring them to Babylon to train them for government service. Daniel and these three men were selected. Remember it was said of them (1:17) that God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom.

Daniel had gradually risen in the government until he became what we would call the prime minister of the land. He was able to encourage the king to give exalted positions to his three friends (2:49). As a result, they became very important in public affairs and were often in the public eye.

These three men, like Daniel, lived at a time of great discouragement. This was particularly true for them since they were intelligent and alert young men. What prospects did they have for the future? Their people were enslaved and despised, a hated people. Their God-given skills and abilities produced jealousy from those around them. In spite of all this, these young men excelled and it was only natural that they should be brought to the attention of King Nebuchadnezzar. They let their light shine, and the king decided to use their talents for the good of his kingdom.

THESE YOUNG MEN KNEW WHAT THE LIGHT WAS

We must know what the light is if we are going to let our light shine. These young men were dedicated to their religion in spite of the position into which they had been placed. They were determined to follow the tradition handed down to them through their religious leaders. They knew the history of their people and the role God played in that history. They knew God had chosen them as a special people, and that through the Jews all peoples on earth would be blessed. To accomplish this purpose the Jewish people would have to be preserved as a nation. In spite of their captivity in Babylon, God’s promises would come to pass.

Daniel and his friends knew the reason God had given them laws to live by through their leader, Moses. It was the way of life that would make them God’s people, different from all other people in the world. These young men knew the Lord God Yahweh was the only God and they could pay homage to no other. It is this certainty that set them apart from the other young men of their day.

Christian parents do their children the greatest of favors when they fortify them with the love of Jesus, which motivates them to develop a strong sense of right and wrong. They will then feel secure under the blessing of God no matter what the situation in their life may be.

FAITHFULNESS OF THESE YOUNG MEN ALLOWED THEIR LIGHT TO SHINE

Even after King Nebuchadnezzar started the training program for Shadrach and his friends, they held firm to their principles. They insisted, for example (1:8), that they be fed at their own table so they might observe the Jewish food laws. They interrupted their other activities to fulfill their duties to the Lord Yahweh. In this way, they were able to let their light shine for others to see.

Our first endeavor then must be to discover what our light is. The only way we can learn this is through the study of God's Holy Word. Jesus said, "Search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39). For us the light is Jesus. He is the center of our life. Everything we do revolves around Him.

Like these Jewish men, we too would glorify our God. How do we do it? How do we let our light shine? Jesus also said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). We let our light shine when we do for others what we know Jesus wants us to do for them. This means we will help them with their physical needs, but most importantly, we will reflect and tell them about the love of Jesus and what it can mean for them in their lives.

ALLOWING THEIR LIGHT TO SHINE EVEN UNDER PRESSURE

It is easy to let our light shine when all is going well and when we are in the company of people who all think as we do. But it is a different matter when we find ourselves surrounded by those who reject the things we believe in, who openly ridicule a faith in God, who refuse to live by the moral principles that we know honor our God. When such is the situation, it is easier to pull back and no longer let our light shine.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego teach us that when we know who the light is, we must let it shine. When we know what is expected of us, we are to do it. Nebuchadnezzar had a large golden statue made of himself. Someone, perhaps to flatter him, came up with the idea that everyone in the kingdom should fall down before that statue and worship it. This became the law of the land and the punishment prescribed was that anyone who failed to worship the statue should be cast into the fiery furnace.

What would you have done under these circumstances? Would you bow the knee before a

worthless statue with your fingers crossed or forfeit your life by stubbornly walking past the statue without giving it a second glance? What did these young men do? They remained true to their religious belief. "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Matt. 4:10).

This action was reported to the king, who had become very proud. It was a real blow to his ego that these young men to whom he had shown such favor would refuse to honor him and openly disobey his decree. Not only were they to be punished in the prescribed way, but the king ordered that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than normal.

When the young men were brought before the king, he expressed his disappointment in them. He indicated that evidently they thought they had some divine power to support them in their defiance of him, but they would soon discover that no one opposed his will. It was then that these young men gave a bold confession of faith.

Then come those words for which we remember them (3:17–18). Be sure that you read these words. We are reminded of Martin Luther as he stood before the Diet at Worms and defied both state and church to prove him wrong in what he had said or written based on the Scriptures. These three men had complete trust in their God, they knew what He expected of them, and they were going to obey Him. If it was God's will, He would preserve them in the fiery furnace, and if He decided not to preserve them, they still would not go against God's will and worship the golden image. They felt secure for they knew they had done the right thing and this could only bring blessing upon them. What a powerful answer!

What a lesson for us! We must do what we know is right. If we have studied the Scriptures, we know the Lord will have developed in us a strong sense of right and wrong. Our conscience will have been sharpened and we had better listen to it, for it is the voice of God speaking to us. When we start to act

against conscience, we endanger our spiritual life. But when we stand firm, despite the threats that are made against us, then we let our light shine.

TRUST IN GOD LETS THEIR LIGHT SHINE

Not only did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego speak boldly to the king and thus express their confidence in God, but by what happened they proved that the promises of God are faithful. God delivered them from the burning fiery furnace. This made it possible for their light to shine even more brightly.

After having heard their strong confession of faith, we are not surprised by what happened. King Nebuchadnezzar and his servants looked into the furnace from a good distance because they remembered how these three men had been bound hand and foot and cast into the midst of the flames of the overheated furnace (3:21). But they were curious and wanted to see what had happened. Or could it have been that there was a lingering fear that the God whom these men confessed, the God whom Daniel acknowledged and revealed to the king, was able to deliver them (2:47)?

What did their eyes behold? These men who had been bound when they were cast into the furnace were now walking about freely in the midst of the flames and the fire was not consuming them. Three men had been cast into the furnace, and now they saw four men moving about. Nebuchadnezzar himself described this fourth as “like a son of the gods” (3:25). He saw the angel of the Lord. Now this pagan king was “seeing the light”!

Was the confidence of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego justified? YES, it was. The king came near and called the three men out. Out they walked, these three heroes of the faith. It is most interesting what is said of them in 2:37. There was no sign of any burning on their bodies, not one hair of their heads was singed, their coats were not charred, and there was not even the smell of smoke upon them. Truly

a miracle of God’s wonderful preservation! These men let their light shine because they had absolute confidence in God.

This says something to us. We have the light and we are determined that in our life we are going to let that light shine. Beneath it all, do we have the confidence that God will see us through and bless us? We should have if we know our Bible, if we believe the promise the Lord brings to us there: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28). God’s blessing rests upon those who, from His Word, not only know the right thing, but do it.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you,” says the Lord (Heb. 13:5).

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...you are with me” (Psalm 23:4).

“For those who love God all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28).

That is what God says. Do we have the confidence to believe Him? We want to let our light shine, knowing that in this way we glorify Him who loved us with an indescribable love. God loved us so much that He sent His Son to the Cross for us so that all our sins are forgiven and we can be assured we will spend eternity with Him in heaven. May God give us all a confident trust!

CONCLUSION

What a blessing it has been to study Daniel 3 and to look at it in the light of Matthew 5:16, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” What a privilege to think about these three great men of the Old Testament! May we learn from them, and remember them! Above all, let us focus upon God because He is exactly the same God in whom they had such confidence who is active in our lives today. He is our God, a God of mercy, a God of kindness, a God of love. Praise Him!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

EZRA

You will be reading from the ten chapters of the Book of Ezra. Pray to the Holy Spirit that He may give you the guidance you need for your study.

Review

1. How would you apply the lesson you learned from the three men in the fiery furnace to your own life?
-

Ezra 1

For your chronological information:

In 536 BC: Zerubbabel with 42,360 Jews returned to Jerusalem.

In 451 BC: Ezra with 1,754 males returned to build the Temple.

In 444 BC: Nehemiah with an army escort returned to fortify Jerusalem.

2. The Book of Ezra belongs to the historical records of Israel. Read 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 and Ezra 1:1–3. What does this tell you about these books of the Bible?
-

Who is the real author?

3. King Cyrus made Persia a world power. While Daniel served under Cyrus, he very likely told him what God had foretold through His great prophets. What is foretold in the following references?

Jeremiah 25:11–12 and 29:10

Isaiah 44:26–28

4. How does Cyrus show his high regard for the true God in Ezra 1:2?
-

5. Tell how Cyrus financed the return of the Jews. What especially meaningful contribution did he make?
-

Ezra 3

6. What was the first act of the Jews upon returning to Jerusalem?
-

7. Give the conclusions you draw from the actions of the people.
-

8. How extensive was the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians?
-

What was the reaction of the older religious leaders when they saw the outline of the new temple?

9. As you read this chapter, what are you reminded of each time the children of God try to do something worthwhile for the Lord?

10. What was done to hinder the building of the temple and what resulted from this opposition?

Ezra 5 & 6

11. For fifteen years, the building was halted. Who were the two men who incited the resumption of the building?

12. What was of great assistance in the building of the temple according to 6:8?

13. Describe the various things Israel did to show their dedication to the Lord.

6:16 _____

6:17 _____

6:18 _____

6:19 _____

Ezra 7 & 8

14. The rebuilding of the temple is generally credited to Zerubbabel. What was Ezra's mission in Jerusalem according to 7:10?

15. We are deeply impressed by King Artaxerxes for his noble attitudes. Describe them from 7:21 & 25.

16. What important lesson does Ezra imply in 8:28 that we might remember for our own lives?

Ezra 9 & 10

17. What greatly disturbed Ezra the priest about his people?

18. Study Ezra's confession (9:6–15). If you used it as your confession, how would you restate it in two sentences?

19. What was the reaction of the people to the ministry of Ezra? (10:1–3)

20. Tradition has it that Ezra originated the Jewish synagogue, which helped gather the books of the Old Testament. For what are you especially grateful to Ezra?

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Only in Jesus can we find true satisfaction. Only as we become acquainted with the Word of God and what it teaches us can we hope to be truly satisfied. The Cross is the place where the insecure are nourished. Jesus loves each one individually and when we fail, He is right there to forgive us.

EZRA – BEING TRULY SATISFIED

There are times in our lives when everything seems to go wrong and we become extremely pessimistic. Complete despair is only a step away. For this reason, let's look at the life of the priest, Ezra, which speaks to us about disillusionment.

We are coming to the end of the recorded history of God's chosen people in the Old Testament and looking at one of the great leaders He provided for them. The majority of the people had been taken away into exile. While some of the Jewish people were allowed to return to their homeland, many never had that privilege and the great dispersal of the Jews throughout the world had begun.

The man whose life we study today, Ezra, had a sizable influence on the exiles who returned to Judea. He was a great leader, a dedicated man of God who has much to say to us concerning life, as it exists in the confused world of today.

THE RETURN FROM BABYLON

This whole period is covered in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, and also in Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. There were two distinct periods during which some semblance of a kingdom was re-established before the Messiah came.

- The first period was during the years of 536–516 BC, when



Zerubbabel, the Governor, and Jeshua, the priest, rebuilt the temple and reinstated the worship of God to which the people were accustomed.

- The second period was from 457–432 BC when the new governor, Nehemiah, with the assistance of Ezra, the priest, rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem so that it again became a fortified city. The book of Ezra tells us of both these periods.

This captivity had been crushing to Israel's national pride. They were always boasting that they were the sons of Abraham who had never been in bondage to anyone because they were children of the one and only living God (John 8:33).

Israel thought that they had a special relationship with God like no one else. We know how zealous they were, at least outwardly, in their determination to have only the one God, Yahweh. As a result, they felt that their dedication merited His special favor upon them as a people. Can you then understand what this captivity must have done to them as they wondered why Yahweh had let them down and allowed them to suffer this indignity?

Their relationship to God centered very much in their temple at Jerusalem. Not only was that temple destroyed by their captors, but also they were completely cut off from it. They could no longer gather there to worship God and perform their religious duties, which to them had become the vital force of their culture. How empty that made their lives!

Lingering in the minds of these people was the oft-repeated promise of God that eventually He would send the Messiah. This Savior was to come from their nation and would bring salvation to His people. By now, they had begun to think of the Messiah more as a military deliverer than as a spiritual redeemer. Thus, this captivity really crushed their hopes that this promise would be fulfilled because at this time they could hardly be called a nation.

When the Babylonians marched the Jews away into captivity, they felt as though the world had come to an end for them. We can sympathize with them because

we are inclined to feel that way also when we see what is happening in our beloved country. Haven't we regarded ourselves as a special chosen people of God? But now people seem to have lost their sense of right and wrong and actually revel in doing evil. There is open unbelief and blasphemy. All this makes us feel that the end is near. That makes us sad, not for ourselves, because we know what is going to happen to us, but for the many who are a part of this downward movement and seemingly give no thought to it.

At the time of the Exile, the Lord felt that the Jews had learned their lesson and were now ready to turn back to Him in true repentance and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. So He compelled King Cyrus of Persia, who now ruled the kingdom in which the Jews were held captive, to command that all those who desired might return to their homeland under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

THE RETURN UNDER EZRA CAME LATER

With the encouragement of King Cyrus, the first thing to which these people devoted themselves was the rebuilding of the temple of God. This says something very important to us (Psalm 33:12; Proverbs 14:34; Psalm 144:15). While many people today feel that the church is not important and that going to church is not necessary, God has allowed the book of Ezra to come to us that we may know that our religious life is basic to our national welfare. The Jewish people realized the importance of this. They had only one temple that helped to unify them in their relationship and worship of their God.

BEING TRULY SATISFIED

An interruption in the story is in order. When Jesus fed the multitudes in the wilderness on a few loaves of bread and several fish, the Scriptures record, "And they all ate and were satisfied" (Matt. 15:37). This means more than the fact that the growling in their stomachs had come to an end. Jesus satisfied not only their physical hunger, but their spiritual hunger as well. Even before He gave them these loaves and fish, He had offered them the Bread of Life. All day long, He had been speaking to them the great truths that God had sent Him to reveal.

Praise God, we have had these same experiences. Jesus has fed us spiritually and physically. He has given us food and all that we need to support our body and life. He has helped us through crises; He has sustained us in many dangers; He has surely made us aware of His gracious willingness to help. Yet how quickly we forget. The very next crisis that arises in our life finds us stewing and fretting with our worries. Like the people in the wilderness, we cannot simply eat and be satisfied because there is always something else to interfere with our enjoyment of life.

Only in Jesus can we find true satisfaction. Only as we become acquainted with the Word of God and what it teaches us can we hope to be truly satisfied. The Cross is the place where the insecure are nourished. Jesus loves each one individually and when we fail, He is right there to forgive us. When our life seems purposeless, He shows us the things that we can do for Him. We discover that we can become so involved in doing things for Him that we have no time for our own selfish desires. With Jesus dwelling in us, we have an intravenous food source that is never disconnected. Jesus surges strength into us, and as the Holy Spirit moves in us and works in us, we find the kind of satisfaction that makes life worthwhile. Then we can look at ourselves and be satisfied in the right way.

The love of Jesus will heal any feelings of self-condemnation. We can even love ourselves and the things we do because we know that Jesus loves us. We can enjoy being ourselves by being thankful for the fact that God made us just the way we are, each a little different from anyone else. We have a security in our God and want to do something worthwhile with our life, especially to help other people find what we have found in Jesus. We who have felt the healing power of Christ in our lives can truly become the agents of healing to others. When this happens, we feel real satisfaction.

BACK TO EZRA

Ezra felt this satisfaction when he gathered with his people at the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. In his book, Ezra describes for us the manner in which the temple was reconstructed under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

It began, as it seems all projects in the Kingdom do, with a collection (Ezra 2:68) which was done freely and willingly. The dedication of the people showed itself in their desire to build the altar of the Lord first. They kept all the ceremonies as best they could even before the foundation for the temple was laid (3:1–6). But when the older people, who had seen the glorious temple of Solomon, saw the dimensions of the temple and its probable appearance, they wept with disappointment. As the glory of their nation had diminished, so also was the glory of their temple.

As always, the enemies of the Lord made things difficult. At first, they came to Zerubbabel and offered their assistance in building the temple (4:2), but the leaders of the Jews did not allow that. These people then went to Cyrus and asked him to stop the Jews from building their temple, and so the building project came to a halt (4:24).

But when Darius ascended to the throne, Zerubbabel, assisted by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (5:1), felt comfortable in continuing the construction of the temple. Darius also provided necessary funds for this building (6:7–8). Finally, the day came when the temple was finished. With joy, God's people once again dedicated it to the glory of God. In total commitment, they observed the Passover. It had deep meaning for them because they knew that once again they had been brought out of bondage (6:18–19).

EZRA APPEARS ON THE SCENE

All that has been described thus far took place before the time of Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem. It is now the year 457 BC and the Persian King Artaxerxes sends Ezra back to Jerusalem with another contingent of Jews. Ezra is described as a man who was a ready scribe in the Law of Moses, a man steeped in the Scriptures, whose life made such an impression on the king that he had complete confidence in him (7:6). Ezra was sent to Jerusalem with this group of people in order to reestablish the moral principles for which this nation had always been known (7:10). It is fascinating that a heathen king should be concerned about these captive people! What is more, Ezra was

given authority by the king to appoint the necessary officials to accomplish his work. Ezra's reaction was to praise the Lord for His wonderful ways (7:25–28).

As Ezra led his group of people back to Jerusalem, he was most concerned about their spiritual condition (8:21). Ezra declared a fast that they “might humble ourselves before our God.” They needed to humble themselves and confess their sins to Him so that they might recognize His grace. Then they would be under the blessing of God and would assure themselves and their families that God was with them.

Ezra brought great treasure with him to assist in the re-establishment of the Jewish culture (8:24–25). He observed this would be most difficult because the people had forgotten that the Lord intended them to be a separate people and to serve only Him. Even among the religious leaders, there was evidence that they had become too much like the people all around them and were guilty of the same abominations. The need for Ezra's ministry was apparent (9:1).

EZRA'S CONFESSION OF SIN

To begin the work which he now sees clearly he must do, Ezra offers a sincere confession of sin (9:6–15). “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you.” Do we have that sense of guilt that we blush when we feel ourselves in the presence of God? Are we conscious of the enormity of our sins and that they increase day by day until they “reach to heaven”? Do we see the progression of sin in our lives, as Ezra saw it in the lives of his people? Are we conscious of the increased immorality that betrays the spiritual condition of our day? The Lord, indeed, has reason to bring chastisement upon us as He did in allowing Israel to be brought into captivity. Are we aware that God's grace is still shown to us as it was to the remnant of His people who were released? Ezra does well to ask us, as he did his people, “Shall we break your commandments again?” (9:14).

EZRA ATTACKS THE PROBLEM

Instead of merely dealing with symptoms, Ezra goes to the source of the problem. As Ezra made his confession

before his people, the people wept, for they knew that he spoke the truth (10:1). They acknowledged their sins and expressed their faith in the promise of God concerning their salvation (10:2). Ezra then declared that if they were sincere in their proclamation they must put away their heathen wives and the children born of such marriages (10:10–11). All agreed that they would do this difficult thing and the task was begun.

Very abruptly, the book of Ezra comes to an end. As we study the book of Nehemiah, we discover that Ezra assisted in other reforms in the land. Tradition makes him the originator of the synagogue worship, which would be in full keeping with the purpose for which he had been sent back to Jerusalem. The intensive study of God's Word could hardly take place at the temple with the throngs of people there. The smaller synagogues provided a better opportunity. It is also thought that it was the formation of these synagogues which brought about the gathering of the Old Testament books as we have them today, and that it was the scribes we read about in Jesus' time who were engaged in making the copies of these books for use in the synagogues.

CONCLUSION

As Ezra looked back upon his life, he must have felt a deep spiritual satisfaction knowing that God had been able to use him for the spiritual growth of His people. It was possible because once again the Lord had become their Hope and their Guardian.

As the Lord becomes our One-and-all, we feel the urge to say with the Psalmist:

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's” Psalm 103:1–5.

Yes, in Jesus we can be truly satisfied!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

NEHEMIAH

You will be looking into the book of Nehemiah. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you an understanding of what you will be reading.

Review

1. From your notes, what did you observe as the secret to real satisfaction in life?

2. What was the mission that was given to Ezra as he returned to Jerusalem?

Nehemiah 1

3. What was it that made Nehemiah conscious of his fellow Jews who had returned to Jerusalem? How did Nehemiah demonstrate the kind of person he was?

4. Why was Nehemiah able to appear before King Artaxerxes?

Nehemiah 2

5. What did the king observe about Nehemiah and how did Nehemiah reply?

6. What was Nehemiah's request of the king?

7. It might be well at this point to review what the Bible teaches about the power of prayer. Examine the following passages and summarize each one.

Matthew 7:7–8

Psalms 50:15

Isaiah 65:24

Philippians 4:6

John 16:23

8. Give an example from your own life that shows the power of prayer.

9. Show that the Lord does indeed answer prayer from Nehemiah (2:6–8).

10. Describe the faithfulness of Nehemiah to his task. (2:12–16)

11. Chapter 3 tells us how Nehemiah organized the building of the walls of Jerusalem and Chapter 4 tells how they worked under adversity. Comment on a few things in Chapter 4:
Why could much be accomplished?

In what two ways did they meet?

How was the work force diminished?

12. From Chapter 5, describe the social conditions in Jerusalem and how Nehemiah improved these conditions.

13. Even after Nehemiah and his people completed the walls of Jerusalem, much of the joy was taken away because he had to deal constantly with opposition. The Bible has something to say about this. Find the answer in these two verses: Acts 14:22 and Revelation 2:10.

14. From 7:66–69 describe the result of the census taken.

Nehemiah 8

15. Ezra coordinated his efforts with those of Nehemiah. What did he do at this time? What important truth is revealed in verse 8?

Give the first reaction of the people when they heard the reading of the law. (8:9)

16. According to Nehemiah and Ezra, how should the people react? (8–10)

What should be our reaction?

What consolation do we have?

17. Read about the Feast of the Tabernacles in Leviticus 23:34ff. It was a thanksgiving festival. As a result, what did the people do? (8:17)

18. Chapter 9 is the prayer of the Levites and their review of the mercy of God. Summarize what they said about God (vv. 31–33).
-
19. In Chapter 10, the people renewed their covenant with the Lord. What was the token of the covenant? (10:35)
-
20. The remainder of the book tells how Nehemiah organized the land with the help of Ezra. Describe what you find in Chapter 13 about the basic nature of people.
-
21. Give a verse from Nehemiah that has special meaning for you.
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We can appreciate the thoughts of Israel when they found themselves forced to live in a foreign land. They could not wait to get home again. How galling it must have been for them, a freedom-loving people, to be held in virtual slavery in Babylonia. You can imagine their joy and pride when finally they were allowed to return to their homeland.

It is this same pride that still motivates Israel today.

NEHEMIAH – GOING HOME

Our journey through the Old Testament has taken us a long way and we are now approaching the end of our travels. The man of whom we speak today was the last leader whose work is recorded for us in the Bible. His task was to lead the remainder of those who had been taken into the Babylonian Captivity back to the Land of Promise, back to the Holy City, Jerusalem, where together they rebuilt the walls. The special joy for him and the other people of God is summed up in the words, “GOING HOME.”

This is the goal in the life and work of each of us — to go home with the Lord. Our home is not the earthly Jerusalem, but the heavenly one. That’s a comforting way we often use to describe the end of a believer’s life: “He went home to the Lord!”

We have spoken about the Babylonian Captivity in detail in connection with Queen Esther, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, and then Ezra the priest. Nehemiah was a man chosen by the Lord to complete the return of the Israelites to what little remained of their country, which was the area surrounding Jerusalem. In this way, they would have the semblance of being a nation so that God’s great promise could be fulfilled of a Savior to be born from this nation.

THE TIME OF NEHEMIAH

There are those who believe that First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah were all written by Ezra as a record of this period in the history of Israel. It seems very likely that Nehemiah himself wrote the book that bears his name because it is very personal. Yet we also remember that he worked very closely with Ezra.

Ezra had been in Jerusalem thirteen years before Nehemiah appeared. Some of the Jews had been back in this area for almost a hundred years already but had accomplished very little in re-establishing themselves as a nation. The rebuilding of the temple had been a much delayed project and nothing had been done about the fortifications of their city. In 444 BC, Nehemiah arrived and was able to bring about the unification and organization of the Jewish nation.

To the Israelites, the land of Judah meant everything, as it does to this day. In many ways, these people had a far greater pride in their country than we seem to have in ours. We really do not take very good care of our beautiful country. People make a great fuss about ecology and then litter the countryside with trash. It saddens us to see the once sacred ideals of our country being forgotten.

We can appreciate the thoughts of Israel when they found themselves forced to live in a foreign land. They could not wait to get home again. How galling it must have been for them, a freedom-loving people, to be held in virtual slavery in Babylonia. You can imagine their joy and pride when finally they were allowed to return to their homeland. It is this same pride that still motivates Israel today.

The time had come when, according to God's calendar, the plans for His Kingdom had to proceed. The time for His visitation upon His rebellious people was at an end. They could now

return to their homeland. Two waves of people had already returned under Zerubbabel and Ezra. Some of their culture had resurfaced in their temple as they had begun to observe the festivals prescribed for them by the Lord. But so much remained to be done and many who could help were still in Babylon. The Lord chose a leader for them, a dedicated young man by the name of Nehemiah.

NEHEMIAH SEEKS PERMISSION TO GO

Some people returned from Jerusalem and reported on conditions there. When Nehemiah learned about how pitiful the situation was, he sat down and cried, fasted, and prayed. He knew that it was the will of God that he do something to improve these conditions. The report spurred him into action.

It was not difficult for Nehemiah to approach the high and mighty King Artaxerxes for he served as his butler, with an emphasis on providing wine for the king. After learning of the circumstances in Jerusalem, Nehemiah appeared with a very sad countenance before the king. This was unusual because ordinarily he was a cheerful person. When the king asked him why he had such a long face, it gave him the opening that he sought. He asked the king for permission to lead the rest of his people back to Jerusalem (2:5).

The type of person that Nehemiah was is reflected in the fact that the king agreed at once to allow him to go. When Nehemiah went to his people and told them what had happened, you can picture these people in their excitement making ready to return to their homeland. The air was filled with singing for they were going home.

When we think of death and of eternal life in heaven, our reaction should be the same. Though we ought to be looking forward to heaven, we still have the natural man to deal with. We've grown accustomed to our current abode. Even though we are "foreigners and strangers" here, we have grown

to like this land pretty well. The Lord allows us to live here so we can prepare for and anticipate that “happy home” toward which we are moving. This ought to give us food for thought.

For our purpose, I think it would be well if we devoted a moment once again to speak about the power of prayer. Nehemiah did not approach King Artaxerxes before he had fervently prayed to the Lord for guidance and help, and only then did he have the courage and boldness to speak. He knew the Lord would bring about the results that were according to His divine plans. How important prayer is in our every endeavor! God in speaking to us about prayer deals only in positives and knows no limitations. Why are we so hesitant? Prayer always finds an answer and the best answer possible, for it is the answer of a loving Father.

NEHEMIAH RETURNS TO JERUSALEM

The very first night that Nehemiah was back in Jerusalem, he arose and by moonlight viewed the city, particularly its crumbled walls. He found that the streets were still so filled with rubble that it was virtually impossible to travel on them (2:13). Up until now, nobody knew about the commission that had been given to Nehemiah and this night-visit convinced him that he had to proceed with haste. The next day he addressed the people, “Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” And they said, “Let us rise up and build” (2:17–18). And, wonder of wonders, we are told, “They strengthened their hands for the good work.” It took the leadership of Nehemiah to goad them on. God had to bring forth a leader who would inspire the people to work for Him. This has always been the story of the building of the Kingdom.

Nehemiah then organized the work in such a way that the whole project could be completed in an orderly fashion and in the shortest time. He divided the construction into sections and had the people from various areas responsible for the section of wall assigned to them. It was a good plan and it worked.

Jesus once said, “The kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt. 11:12). This has always been the story of the building of God’s Kingdom. So also with the work of Nehemiah, there were those who tried to hinder that work. One of those was Sanballat, a prominent leader of one of the heathen nations that had infringed on the land of the Jews during their absence in Babylonia. He did not want those walls rebuilt, so he tried to arouse opposition to the effort. The result was that the number of workers had to be reduced so that half of them could stand guard while the other half worked (4:16). In fact, the situation became so severe that it was necessary to arrange for a general alarm. Since the workers were scattered over the entire wall of Jerusalem, a trumpet blast was sounded to call all the workers to the danger zone (4:20). This meant that with their building tools these people also had to carry weapons. But Nehemiah could assure them, “Our God will fight for us” (4:20).

While Nehemiah’s major interest was rebuilding the walls, he was not unmindful of the terrible conditions in the land in which the people lived. He observed how those who had means were taking advantage of the majority who were desperately poor. He addressed himself to these people in no uncertain terms, saying, “Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God?” (5:9). The result was that he was able to bring relief to the poor.

NEHEMIAH ACCOMPLISHES HIS TASK

Finally, the work of construction was completed (6:15), and Nehemiah was now able to turn to other things. The success of this effort was disturbing to the enemies of the Jews, for they could see that God was blessing His people (6:16).

One of the first things Nehemiah did was to conduct a census of the people so that it might be known how many there were, who they were, and what their conditions were (7:5). The census revealed that there were 42,360 people. It seems almost unbelievable that the mighty people of God, the kingdom of David and Solomon, had dwindled to such a small number.

Nehemiah was also determined to build up the spiritual life of these people, for if they were God's people, they must have a strong relationship with God. It was here that he was able to use the assistance of Ezra who had already begun the work of re-establishing the religious culture of Israel. A convocation of all the people was called. Ezra was instructed to bring forth the Book of the Law of Moses and to have this read for all to hear (8:1).

By this time, Ezra had probably gathered all the books which now constitute the Old Testament, except perhaps for a few Minor Prophets. The people heard not only about the sojourn in Egypt and entering the land of promise but they were made aware of the history of their nation during its days of glory. They also received the warning of what happened when they forsook the Lord. They had a chance to learn the wonderful Psalms and to discover the great wisdom of Solomon. It must have been a refreshing experience for these people, an inspiration that would send them forth with the determination to be God's people

The reaction of the people at first was one of grief for they realized how they had failed the Lord, and how they deserved what had happened to them (8:9). But once they got into the spirit of things and decided to keep the feasts which God had ordained, "there was very great rejoicing" among them (8:17). The first feast they observed was the Feast of the Tabernacles, described in Leviticus 23. It was a thanksgiving festival observed in a much different fashion than we celebrate Thanksgiving Day. We enjoy the wealth of bounty, they endured hardship. For one week, they moved out of their homes into tents or small booths. They ate the simplest kind of food. Thereby they hoped to express to God their appreciation for what they had. They did not forget the Giver, as we perhaps are inclined to do. This celebration brought joy to their hearts.

In Chapter 9, we have the prayer of the Levites, the spiritual leaders of the people, showing us how different the spirit they now had was from the one they demonstrated before their exile into Babylonia. They acknowledged the wonderful way in which God had dealt with them as a people and concluded with a tremendous expression of faith, saying, “You are a gracious and merciful God” (9:31), and “You have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly” (9:33). They concluded their prayer by saying, “Because of all this we make a firm covenant” (9:38). They established themselves once again as God’s chosen people, making possible God’s plan for sending the Savior in due time.

The sealing of the oath is described for us in Chapter 10. Chapter 11 describes how the people were to dwell not only in the city of Jerusalem, but also in the area round about, and how this land was divided among them. It was like a new beginning similar to the time when Joshua first conquered the land.

The book of Nehemiah closes by telling how Nehemiah dealt with some of the abuses that were showing their heads. All this makes us conscious of the corrupt nature of man. After this great spiritual experience, one would have expected to find a people wholly dedicated to pleasing the Lord. Yet they coveted the things of the heathen, still intermarried with them, and did many other things that were an offense to God. What a warning for us!

CONCLUSION

We began by speaking about the anticipation of the Jews in their return home. Far from being home-like, it was a land of desolation and destruction. The city of Jerusalem was in shambles and their glorious temple in absolute ruins. The countryside of vineyards and olive groves was overgrown with weeds. It was

completely unproductive and so the people were hungry. What a disappointment! They looked and wept. It was not like their parents told them it would be.

Perhaps you have gone back to the place of your childhood with many fond memories only to find that it was not the same anymore. But it is not going to be that way when we get to our heavenly home. We have only a small concept of what heaven will be like, but we know it will be much more glorious than we can even imagine. Everything we see or touch in this world is flawed. We haven’t yet experienced perfection, but only longed for it. Heaven is perfection.

Can we actually be sure that we are going to get to heaven? Yes, we can. The Lord has seen to it that you have heard the wonderful story of Jesus. You know that He died for your sins on the cross, that you are forgiven and thus an heir of eternal life. The Lord has worked upon your heart so that you have by faith accepted Jesus as your Savior, and His promise is that “whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” The Bible has also affirmed that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). You know that God never goes back on a promise!

In the meantime, God has been strengthening your faith in Jesus by allowing you to hear the Gospel weekly and by inspiring you to exercise your faith in your Christian life. Now, most important of all, you have the assurance of God that long before you were born God had elected you for salvation because He saw what Jesus would do for you (Eph. 1:3–6). Since God chose you to go to heaven there can be no question in your mind that you will arrive there. You know that you are one of the chosen because of what the Holy Spirit has been able to do in you. So we are on the way home — on the way to our heavenly home. Our arrival is certain, and it will be a Land of Lasting Joy!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

AMOS

May the Holy Spirit give you His guidance as you read the book of the prophet Amos.

Review

1. What did you learn about Nehemiah that will be helpful in your life?

2. Mention some of the things that made it possible for Nehemiah to accomplish what he did.

General Information on Amos:

Amos was from Judah, yet did his work in the Northern Kingdom around 750 BC. This was shortly before the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and almost 200 years before the Babylonian Captivity. He probably knew Jonah and Elisha.

2. As you begin to read the book of Amos (1:1), list his occupation and home.
-
3. To understand the work of this man better, you need to know about the two kings mentioned. Give their names, their province and a comment about each. (Also see 2 Chronicles 26:1–4 and 2 Kings 14:23–24)
-
4. The general impact of the book (1:3) is repeated again and again. List a part of the message of the prophet against Judah (2:4).
-
5. Amos chides Israel for its moral injustices. See how many of these you can find mentioned in verses 2:6–8.
-
6. When God gave Israel prophets to show them the right way, how did Israel respond? (2:11–12)
-
7. What is the truth the prophet expresses in 3:3? _____
 How could you apply this verse to your life? _____
 When only can we expect the blessing of the Lord? (Psalm 1) _____
8. What false impression might one gain from 3:6? _____
 How can we correct that false impression? (Neh. 9:17; Psalm 103:8; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4).
-
9. What common tendency in people does the prophet describe in 4:1?
-

How did Jesus combat this attitude in Matthew 7:12 and John 15:12?

10. What was God's constant desire for His people? (4:6–13)

11. What are your thoughts as you read the first part of 5:12? (Personal)

12. Read 5:14–15. Why would the people of Amos' time not understand these words in the same way that we do? (Galatians 4:4–5)

13. Describe what you think the words of 6:1 meant to those complacent people and how could we apply them to ourselves?

14. How did the false priest, Amaziah, describe what Amos was doing? (7:10)

15. By what justification could Amos carry on his work? (7:14–15)

By what justification can we carry on our Christian ministry? (Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:8)

16. Describe the picture the prophet paints in 8:11–12.

Do you think this is true for our day? Why or why not?

17. Judgment has been passed. What does the prophet see at the outset of Chapter 9?

With the symbolism we see in our church, how would you picture the Lord standing by the altar on a Sunday morning?

18. What truths about God do you see revealed in 9:5–6? (Gen. 17:1; Luke 1:37; and Psalm 31:2). How would you apply to your life?

19. What glorious truth is yet in the mind of Amos as he concludes his book in 9:8–15?

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The assignment God gave to Amos was to hightail it to the neighboring country and warn the people that they were bringing disaster down upon themselves. Amos packed up and went!



AMOS – GOD’S FAITHFUL MESSENGER

With the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, we have actually come to the end of the historical record of the Old Testament. However, we felt that it might be beneficial if we could look at a few of the Minor Prophets who worked behind the scenes during this period of the history of the people of God. The Minor Prophets are the last twelve books of the Old Testament, starting with Hosea and ending with Malachi.

THE MAN AND HIS MISSION

Amos came from the Kingdom of Judah (Southern Kingdom), the area surrounding the city of Jerusalem. But the Lord dispatched Amos to the Northern Kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel. God had a strong message for these people before their kingdom was destroyed. It could be that He chose Amos to deliver this message because Amos would be an unknown voice in Israel. Jesus had that in mind when He said, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown” (Matt. 13:57). These people might listen more readily to a complete stranger who would bring His message to them.

It had already been two hundred years since the kingdom of David and Solomon had been divided under King Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. The Northern Kingdom, from its very inception, was completely corrupt. They had set up calf-worship as their religion in direct opposition to the Lord Yahweh. They also worshipped Baal, a practice that involved more than just religious worship. This religion advocated immoral acts and lawlessness.



God sent Israel the great prophet Elijah to turn them away from Baal, especially at the time of King Ahab. Most memorable was the day he and the prophets of Baal built altars on Mount Carmel and called upon their gods to send fire from heaven. The true God answered with fire and the Baal prophets were slain. Elijah's successor Elisha had a great influence upon the land because of the wonderful things he was able to do. Yet neither prophet could get the people to turn from their false gods. Then there was Jonah, the prophet who was swallowed by a great fish. Though he was able to persuade the people of Nineveh to turn to the Lord in true repentance, his ministry had no effect upon his own people.

We know that one of the things in which the prophet Elisha was most interested was the school of the prophets. It could have been that Amos was one of the students instructed by Elisha. It could also be that the prophet Joel came out of these schools and that Amos was acquainted with his work, for he speaks of the plague of grasshoppers about which Joel has so much to say (Amos 7:1). It appears Amos may have been doing his work about the same time as the prophet Hosea. In all this, we see the patience of the Lord and the great mercy He has for His stubborn, sinful children. The Lord repeatedly tries to reach the hearts of these people to get them to turn from their sinful ways. Ours is not a harsh God who delights in punishment. He is a loving God who desires to bless His people. We must be aware of that as we look at our own lives.

How often the Lord has come to guide us, yes, to turn us away from something that could have been very destructive for us. He patiently guides us back to the path that He has chosen for us. All we can say today is, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Amos tells us that he was actually raised to be a herdsman and that while he was following the flocks, the Lord called him. He heeded that call, even though he knew it was a most difficult assignment that the Lord had given him. For comparison,

imagine a young man today preparing for the holy ministry. Seeing the unbelief and the wickedness in the culture around him, he determines to use his life to help people find their way back to God. After studying all the modern approaches to communication and counseling, he receives a call to some foreign country to serve as a missionary. That would be unexpected, indeed. The assignment God gave to Amos was to hightail it to the neighboring country and warn the people that they were bringing disaster down upon themselves. Amos packed up and went!

THE MISSION BEGINS

Amos arrived at Bethel, which would be his headquarters. Bethel had become the religious center of the Northern Kingdom since they cut ties with Jerusalem. Amos at once began the ministry for which he had been called. He got on whatever might serve as a soapbox in those days and began to speak in a loud voice so that he would attract attention.

In modern language, this is the message Amos gave them. Read it carefully, for it has much to say to our day. Here it is:

"You have become rich and have forgotten many things. Look at you! You hate to see the Sabbath come because you are so greedy to earn more money that you can't even take time out to worship your God. You cheat your customers by loading the bottom of their grain sacks with stones. You water down the milk as you sell it so they only get half-value. You give the scales a slight twist with your thumb when you weigh their purchases. You sell the poor into slavery the moment they can't pay their bills. You care nothing for those who are suffering. You sell the penniless for a pair of shoes.

"You are well-to-do and proud of all that you have gained for yourselves, but in your soul, there is a spiritual famine. You began as God's chosen ones, now you have all but forgotten your heritage. Now you waste your lives in chasing after pleasure, in piling up

even more wealth and in stomping on the poor. While you are so engrossed in all of these things, you are drifting ever further from the wonderful God who made you. You are no better than cattle that show no regard for the one who feeds them. You had better listen to what I say to you for the only end to all this is decay and death.”

What a message that was! What strong words! Clear and to the point! It is also a message for our day. Does it not describe life as we see it all around us day by day? Must not the realization of what happened to these people awaken in us the need to turn to God in repentance and to seek His forgiveness? The decay is already evident and death is near the door. How long can our country continue to exist with all the corruption, lawlessness and open rebellion against God? How long can people who have been so richly blessed neglect the Lord and their worship of Him?

THE MISSION IS INTERRUPTED

At this point, one of those who listened to Amos had heard enough. It was Amaziah, the priest at Bethel (Amos 7:10), who was ready to blow a fuse because he felt that Amos was attacking him and his ministry as a failure. Amos had really “stepped on his toes” when he described the spiritual condition of the people. Anyone who proclaims a message like that today would meet firm opposition.

In this case, Amaziah sent a courier to King Jeroboam at once to tell him that this stranger, Amos, was conspiring against him. He had understood correctly what Amos said, for he had the messenger tell the king that Amos said the king would be killed by the sword, that Israel would be conquered, and the people would be led away as slaves (Amos 7:11).

As soon as the courier was on his way, Amaziah pushed his way through the crowd to confront this young upstart. How dare this stranger come into his

turf and carry on in such a fashion before his people! He stormed up to the front, grabbed Amos by the shoulder of his shepherd’s garment, and in essence growled, “All right, get moving. We don’t need your ridiculous ideas around here. I don’t know where you came from, but wherever it is, go back there and tell them the terrible things you have said here today. We don’t need that kind of talk around here. Maybe others will listen to you, but let us alone” (Amos 7:12–13).

This did not stop Amos for a moment. He went right on speaking to the people. He said, “I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser [grower] of sycamore figs” until the day that God called me and told me to “Go, prophesy to my people Israel” (Amos 7:14–15). God sent me here to tell your people these things and I’m not through with what I’m supposed to tell you. “Therefore, hear the word of the Lord!” (Amos 7:16). What a brave man! How we admire him.

THE MISSION COMES TO A CLOSE

Turning again to the people, Amos spoke the last part of the message that God had for these people. You have the essence of what he said in Amos 8:11–14:

“You have forgotten God. He is going to send a famine upon your land. It will not be a famine of bread, but a famine where you will no longer hear the words of the Lord. As a people, you will wander from sea to sea and from north to south seeking some word from the Lord but you will not find it. Behold, the eyes of the Lord are upon you. He knows your sinful ways. He will destroy your nation off the face of the earth, saving only the House of Jacob.”

Amos continued to speak to the people privately as they came to him. His message was a simple repetition of what he had said earlier. In summary, you have it in Amos 5:14–15: “Turn away from your evil

ways and seek to walk in the ways of the Lord, and then the Lord will be merciful to you and save you.”

But when all is said and done, how effective was the work of the prophet Amos? We know that the Word of the Lord is never proclaimed in vain, but it appears that few paid much attention to what Amos said. His listeners carried on in their blind way. Eventually they were overcome by the Assyrians in 722 and were led away captive just as Amos had foretold. During their captivity, the people began to remember the words of Amos. Many of them repented of their evil ways, turned back to the Lord and ultimately some of them were allowed to return to their homeland. But just think of what could have happened if all of them would have listened to Amos that day as he stood on his soapbox in Bethel.

In the meantime, Amos completed his mission to these people, climbed from his temporary pulpit and went back to Tekoa to tend his flocks and prune his fig trees. Thus ended one of the shortest preaching missions on record. While the Kingdom of Israel was in complete turmoil, Amos, the quiet rural servant of God, lived out his days peacefully writing his book that we carry around in our Bibles today as part of God’s Word to us. Actually, this quiet man who preached in Bethel’s marketplace started a fire in the hearts of God’s people that never went out. It was still there many years later when the Lord Jesus came down to earth. It was in that remnant who were faithful to the Lord and waited for their Messiah who would save them from their sins and bring them back to God. That fire is still burning today in every Christian mission effort.

CONCLUSION

We hear mostly about the bad things that are happening in our world and nation today. The news media focuses often on the negative, and we are inclined to think that all people have bowed their knees before Baal or Mammon (materialism). The prevailing attitude is that only simple-minded people really believe the truth of the Gospel. But, in fact, there are many people who have taken the Lord Jesus into their hearts and accepted Him as their Savior. They have found forgiveness for their sins, peace with God, hope of heaven and now are living in that faith by doing the things that give honor to their Lord and God. Let us not become discouraged. Let us stand firm! Let us be bold! Let us strive to get this message to more and more people.

America is still a bastion of hope for the world because the message of the Savior is transmitted from this country to the entire world. We plead with the people of our nation to heed the words of the prophet Amos, “Seek good, and not evil, that you may live...so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious” (Amos 5:14–15). God is gracious for He sent Jesus to bring us peace and forgiveness with God in this world, and eternal bliss and joy in the hereafter. May God increase the number of those who believe this!

Note: In the studies of Amos, Micah, and Malachi, I have been indebted to a book “Men Who Dared” by Barbara Jurgensen, the wife of a Lutheran student pastor. I used many of her paraphrases for the words the prophets spoke.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

MICAH

Pray that the Holy Spirit will direct your thoughts as you read the book of Micah.

Review:

1. From your notes, what was the background of the prophet Amos and the mission on which he was sent? What was the message he was to declare?

2. The books of the Minor Prophets are not in chronological order. At what time did the prophet Micah work? (1:1)

3. Give a brief statement about each of these kings.
Jotham – 2 Kings 15:32–34 _____
Ahaz – 2 Kings 16:1–3 _____
Hezekiah – 2 Kings 18:1–8 _____
4. Micah was a contemporary of two great prophets — Isaiah and Hosea. When you recall the great messages of Isaiah, particularly Chapter 53, what effect would that have on Micah?

5. Give the main theme of Micah's message to the people. (1:2–5)

6. As you look at Chapter 2, especially verses 2 & 9, what is the basic thing in the lives of these people that shows their true character?

7. Even as the Lord chides them through His prophet, what hope does He always hold out to them (2:12–13)? Why is this so important?

8. In Chapter 3, the prophet becomes specific. Against whom does he witness? Why?
Verses 1–4: _____
Verses 5–7: _____
Verse 11: _____
9. How beautifully Micah changes gears in Chapter 4. As you read the first two verses, what impression do you gain?

10. In whom will this prophecy be fulfilled? (Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:29) _____
11. What is characteristic of the Kingdom of Christ? (4:3–4; John 14:27)

12. How does Micah describe the dedication of the people in this Kingdom of Christ (4:5)? What do you think this dedication includes?

13. What is the historical fact foretold in 4:8–10? _____
14. Chapter 5 continues along the same theme of Messianic hope. What significance does verse 2 have?

15. When was this verse of special importance for the universal proclamation of the Gospel (Matthew 2:6)? What do the words “whose origins are from old, from ancient times” mean to you?

16. What picture forms in your mind as you read 5:4?

17. In Chapter 6, look at verse 8 and apply it to your life. Give an example of the following.
To do justly _____
To love mercy _____
To walk humbly _____
18. Read the contrasts Micah makes in Chapter 7:5–7. How can we apply this message to our lives?

19. Micah ends on a beautiful note by demonstrating the correct use of Law and Gospel (7:18–19). What does the Law reveal to us? (Romans 3:20)

- What does the Gospel reveal? (John 3:16)



GREAT PEOPLE

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

MICAH

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The Messiah has come, and by the grace of God we can see Him with the eyes of faith. He is the Christ, the Son of God, born for us in the little village of Bethlehem, grown to manhood to lead His people against their spiritual enemies.

MICAH – MESSAGE OF THE COMING MESSIAH

The prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea. He came from the area that had formerly been the stronghold of the Philistines, a rugged terrain where life was hard. Micah's stinging message was directed at both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms, particularly their capital cities, Samaria and Jerusalem, which indicated the moral poverty of these people. Micah spoke very sharply about the same sin of which most of the prophets spoke. It was their idolatry, the sin that is at the root of all other sins. Micah also brings us some of the finest Messianic prophecies of any of the prophets.

MICAH'S MISSION

In your mind, picture Micah after having received a call from the Lord to go forth as His prophet. He threw together the few necessary travel items that he could carry: a goatskin bag to hold some water, a slab of salt-cured fish, several pounds of dates, and his rough woolen robe that would serve as his coat when it was cold and as his blanket at night. He set off on foot for what he knew would be a dusty speaking tour of the land. He probably had trepidation in his heart as he began his journey, for he didn't know where it would take him or whom he would meet.

When he started to speak, people knew he had a message from God and they listened. But once the people learned the drift of his message, their attitude changed because he was not presenting the kind of things that



were popular. Instead of a complimentary message that would make his audience feel good and pious inside, Micah spoke words that cut to the quick and aroused the consciences until his listeners felt a deep pain within themselves.

For example, in Chapter 2, Micah, in essence, said,

“You lie awake nights scheming how you can get the best of your neighbor and take possession of the fine things he has, his fields, flocks, house and even his wife; then you get up in the morning and proceed to cheat him until you have his possessions. You actually hate what is good and you show love for that which is evil. And you who are the leaders of our people are even worse. You treat the people as though they were animals who were made fat for your slaughter. The women of God’s chosen people you have cast out from their pleasant homes, and from their children you have taken away the knowledge of God’s glory, so they do not know how they are to worship God.” Micah said many other similar things that you will find in Chapters two and three.

You can imagine there were those in his audience who were bent over looking for stones that they might cast at this loathsome stranger who had appeared among them. Such a reaction did not trouble Micah. He went right on, for he was not afraid. God had called, God had sent, and God was putting the words into his mouth. “Watch out!” he cried,

“You think God is on your side and nothing can happen to you, but know that God is coming down and He will trample you underfoot because of what you have done to widows and orphans in your selfishness” (Micah 3).

Imagine that a man in the back of the crowd found a stone that was just right and took aim. He was about to let the stone fly. Seeing him, Micah

snatched up his knapsack and darted out through the crowd, out of town, and down the road toward the next village where he would start all over again. In every place, he wanted to tell them about the Messiah and the hope that they could have in Him. He knew his message well, he rehearsed it, and he was able to write it down. We have it in his book in the Bible.

“Out of the little village of Bethlehem would come the great leader of Israel, one who has been from old, even from everlasting.” It was the promise they needed to hear over and over again, for through their sinning, they had made themselves miserable. They needed to know that God’s promise to them was still going to be fulfilled for God had made His plans carefully. The Savior was going to come in God’s good time. Did Micah wonder when that Messiah, the Savior, would come? Could it be in his lifetime? Oh, to be able to see Him!

Our pastors today are fortunate. As they stand in their pulpits, they do not have to fear that someone in the audience is going to throw stones. Even when they speak the hard words the Lord expects of them, when they call a spade a spade and point out where people are failing the Lord, they know that their people will show them the honor that befits a servant of the Lord. It is necessary for the pastor to perform this painful duty of speaking about sin so that people may realize their weaknesses and shortcomings, turn to the Lord to acknowledge their sins and seek His forgiveness.

While the modern pastor is more fortunate than Micah in respect to stone throwers, he is even more fortunate in that he does not have to speculate about the Messiah, his Savior. He does not have to sit back with longing heart and say, “Oh, if only He would come so that I might see Him.”

The Messiah has come, and by the grace of God we can see Him with the eyes of faith. He is the Christ, the Son of God, born for us in the little

village of Bethlehem, grown to manhood to lead His people against their spiritual enemies. It is our Jesus, whom we know as our loving Savior; our Jesus, who prayed, “Father, forgive them”; our Jesus, who willingly bowed His head in death and suffered the final payment for our sins; our Jesus, who rose triumphantly from the grave to claim victory for Himself and for us, saying, “Because I live, you shall live also.” The pastor today can say all these things with absolute certainty. This is the truth!

As Micah trudged along through the dust, he thought about the other prophecy that God had given him to tell the people, that the day would come when the house of the Lord would be established and the people would flock toward it from all nations gathering to sing the praises of God.

In 4:1–2, Micah joyfully proclaims the establishment of “the mountain of the Lord’s temple” and the streaming of the nations to God’s house to learn His ways. Those words began to be fulfilled eight centuries later in the birth and growth of the Christian Church. The writer to the Hebrews tells his readers that they have “come to Mt. Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). Paul exults in the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles to whom he had been sent (Rom. 9:25). God’s kingdom (his “mountain”) established! The nations eager to listen and learn! It all began to take place in God’s perfect time.

The time of Messiah’s coming, Micah proclaimed, would be a time of peace. Nations’ disputes would be settled. The prophet indicates this in a very graphic way when he speaks about beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (4:3). Being at peace with God, people can also be at peace with themselves and everyone around them. As God’s people, we need

no swords or spears, for we are armed with the Gospel of peace that brings good tidings to all men. As Micah says, “We will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever” (4:5).

He sees that all this is possible because he can already see the Baby born in Bethlehem (5:2). Of this Baby whom we know to be the Christ-child, born in such abject poverty in the stable, he says, “And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth” (5:4 RSV).

The prophet calls his hearers to repentance. We hear him say, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8). Once God’s mercy has reached out to us, and we have received Jesus as our only hope of salvation, then we must live in that faith and strive to do His will. Micah mentions some important ingredients of this life of faith, to deal honestly and justly with others, to show mercy and kindness to those in need, and above all to walk in humility before God, remembering it is only by His grace that we are who we are.

As Micah brings his book to a close, he has yet a few more things to say to us in the last chapter. He begins by telling us that we should not put our trust in people, friends, so-called guides, or even our spouses (7:5). As far as Micah is concerned, and he surely advocates this for us too, “I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.” Micah goes on to say, “When I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me” (7:7–8). To this, by the grace of God, we can say a loud “Amen” for we know that our God will help us.

"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity, and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love [mercy]. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18-19). What a comfort!



Remembering the harsh words that Micah spoke at the beginning of his book denouncing the sins of the people, listen now to the comforting words with which he closes his message:

"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity, and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love [mercy]. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18–19). What a comfort!

God never leaves His people comfortless (John 14:18; Isaiah 40:1). This is the secret of our Christian faith. It rests so deeply upon a correct understanding of the division between Law and Gospel.

- The main purpose of the Law (the Ten Commandments, if you please) is to make us aware of our sins. But many want to avoid any mention of their sins and want to use the Law as a guide by which they can earn their way back to God. The Law is there to show us that we are sinners and that God hates sin and must punish it.

- The Gospel, on the other hand, is the message of how this same God who hates sin, nevertheless, was merciful and made it possible for those sins to be forgiven through the efforts of His Son.

CONCLUSION

We can imagine that as the prophet Micah walked along meditating on these things, a silent winged bird soared into the darkening sky. The moon was rising and the first stars were beginning to appear above the Judean hillside. Micah would have to hurry to reach the next little village before complete darkness engulfed the land. He wondered what sort of an audience he would find the next day. Would there be those again who would pick up stones? He hoped not because his message to the people was so important. All must hear it! Would they listen or would they harden their hearts? Oh, that they would listen and turn to God!

Amen, we say, Amen! Oh, that all people would listen, turn to God and find Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The Messiah is coming again!

Note: In the studies of Amos, Micah, and Malachi, I have been indebted to a book "Men Who Dared" by Barbara Jurgensen, the wife of a Lutheran student pastor. I used many of her paraphrases for the words the prophets spoke.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

MALACHI

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you guidance as you read the four chapters of Malachi.

1. As you read your notes on Micah, what did you see as some of his strengths? What did you discover that you could apply to your life?

Prophet Malachi

2. The prophet Malachi likely lived at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets and his work is dated between 450 and 400 BC. While all the other prophets began with a condemnation, write the first words of Malachi from verse 2.

3. The prophet also feels the need to speak of sin. Who receives his first rebuke? (1:6)

4. Why would this be the natural place for Malachi to begin?

5. What is it that he implores them to do in 1:9? (See also 2:7)

6. What glorious truth does Malachi reveal to the Old Testament people of God in 1:11?

7. Observe how beautifully Malachi describes the pastoral ministry in 2:7. What do you see as the function of a pastor according to this verse?

8. What impressive fact does Malachi use to show what our relationship should be toward one another? (2:10)

Malachi 3

9. As you read 3:1, of whom do you immediately think? How does Malachi describe the Lord?

10. Why will the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant to the Lord? (3:4; Isaiah 53)

11. Why do the words of 3:6 bring comfort to your heart? (Jeremiah 31:3; 1 John 4:8–10)

12. With what question does Malachi introduce his instruction on Christian stewardship in 3:8–10?
- _____
13. From Genesis 28:22 and Deuteronomy 14:22, what was a tithe and what command was given concerning it?
- _____
14. In your own words, explain what Malachi teaches us about our stewardship responsibility to the Lord.
- _____
15. Can you share a particular blessing you feel the Lord has given you in response to the stewardship of your time, gifts or talents?
- _____
16. In your life, when would 3:16–17 have special meaning?
- _____
17. You will rejoice in 4:2, perhaps you have heard that verse quoted.
- How is the word “fear” used here? _____
- Who is the “Sun of righteousness (KJV)?” _____
- Why is He given that name? _____
- In what way does He have healing in His wings? _____
18. In 4:5, Malachi speaks of the “prophet Elijah.” What New Testament references are made to this prophecy? What do you learn from this verse?
- _____

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Malachi's ministry to the Jews was to assure them that the Messiah would indeed come, but, if they continued in the present spirit, it would be a time of judgment.



MALACHI – GOD'S LAST MESSENGER UNTIL...

The name Malachi means “My Messenger.” One could say he was the last messenger in Old Testament times until the coming of the Messiah. He pointed people to another who would be “My [God’s!] Messenger” proclaiming the arrival of that Messiah.

The exact time of Malachi’s work is not known. It is generally accepted that he was associated with Ezra and Nehemiah in their work after Israel returned from the Babylonian Captivity. Ezra was involved in the rebuilding of the temple, while Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. This work was completed shortly before 400 BC. At the time of Malachi, the Jews had been “back home” from exile for almost 100 years. They seemed to be cured of their idolatry, but they were prone to neglect the House of God. The priests had become lax and degenerate. Sacrifices were inferior, tithes were neglected, divorce was common and their spiritual life was at a low level.

The Jews, favored by God above all nations of their time, were discouraged by their weakness, wedded to their sins, and settled in a lethargic state of mind to wait for the coming of the Promised Messiah. Malachi’s ministry to the Jews was to assure them that the Messiah would indeed come, but, if they continued in the present spirit, it would be a time of judgment. This, as we know, is exactly what happened to those who cried out, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matt. 27:25). Old Simeon in the temple expressed it correctly when he said, “This child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34).



MALACHI'S MESSAGE

We might summarize the first words of the book of Malachi as saying, "It's about time that someone shuts the doors of the church and puts an end to this pretense which you people call religion. Your worship is nothing but a mockery!" Malachi stood outside the doors of the temple and railed at the people with fury in his words, for he was greatly disturbed by what he saw, knowing what an offense it was to their gracious God.

"Look at the gifts you are bringing to God's Temple!" he shouted at them. The people must have glanced sheepishly at the sacrifices that they brought – perhaps moldy bread they would not eat, a sickly lamb that they probably would otherwise have destroyed, some corn filled with weevils. These people knew that God expected a tenth of all, the first fruits, but they had forgotten that this tenth belonged to their Maker. Malachi called out, "Will a man rob God?" But that was exactly what they were doing.

Malachi's words cause us to pause and take thought as to what we have done in bringing our gifts to the Lord. God has blessed us with the material things of life far more than He blessed these people. Above all, we have that long-promised Messiah and we know exactly what He did for us. He is our Lord Jesus, and in Him, we have found forgiveness for our sins and the certain hope of heaven.

While we live in this forgiving grace and this certain hope, we are blessed with so many physically good things in life. Yet, how do we show our gratitude? What about our tithes? No doubt, the Lord gets too many leftovers, which really do not express the appreciation He deserves.

"And your priests," Malachi goes on, "don't teach you God's ways at all. When you listen to them, they make you feel as though it is a weary thing

to serve the Lord, and they sniff at God with the idea that they have to give an appearance of being godly, but in their own hearts they feel that they are beyond all this." The spirit of these priests has not disappeared in our day. Isn't this the attitude that is taken by any number of religious leaders who have exalted themselves above the Lord? Although they try to appear deeply religious, they do not honor the Lord but exalt themselves.

Malachi did not spare the people. They had committed many and varied sins and he was there to confront them. For example, in Malachi 2, he basically says,

"Look what you have done with marriage. You know that God intended for this to be a special blessing for you and yet, in so many instances, it has actually become a curse because you have persisted in intermarrying with the heathen. You choose as spouses people who are morally and spiritually weak. Consequently, there is a great deal of divorce among you, and your sexual appetites lead you into many different forms of violence." Malachi said this to his people 2,500 years ago. If he stood before us today, he could say the same things, couldn't he?

Malachi then asks,

"What's become of your faith? You don't seem to trust God at all anymore. Why should we go God's way, you say, when those who do so much evil seem to be getting ahead in life, while we are not? You won't believe the promises God makes you unless you actually see the judgment of God being meted out upon those you dislike. Is that all you expect of God? Is He there just to punish your enemies...on your timetable?"

As Malachi spoke, his words burned into the

consciences of his people. They needed that, but so do we. We must see our sins and repent of them or there is no hope of salvation for us. There is nothing we can do ourselves to escape from the terrible situation into which we have gotten ourselves because of our sins. Our only hope lies with God. He is merciful to us in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ our Savior, who has earned forgiveness for us.

But, praise the Lord, while Malachi used the sharp edge of the law to awaken a deep consciousness of sin, he nevertheless was also there to bring to the people the wonderful message of God's grace. He said in effect,

“Are you not aware of the fact that God loves you, for He has chosen you to be His people? The time will come when you will indeed know whether it pays or not to have faith in this wonderful God.”

“When His day of judgment comes, God will deal justly with those who commit adultery, those who falsify His words, those who have crushed others for their own selfish purposes, those who have in every way dishonored Him.”

God wants all to understand who they are, and what He has done and will do for them. The wonderful thing is that today we have the clear Word of God to use in our dealings with each other so that there is a solid foundation of truth.

See how Malachi proceeded in his mission to the people of his day, using a question-and-answer format. In Chapter 1:6–7 God says, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? Says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the

LORD's Table may be despised.” Malachi states the problem and gives God's answer, and you can hardly argue with that.

The matter of sacrifices and tithes were important to the prophet, but he was far more concerned about the inward spiritual condition being demonstrated by the abuses of the people of his day. It was evident that the Israelites had forgotten about the holiness and majesty of God. When a person has lost his moorings so that he no longer knows God, that person flounders around, having neither God nor man to turn to for help.

Malachi was sent by God to these people and God still uses his words to rouse us from our spiritual lethargy and thus be ready to meet our Savior when He comes. For the Jews, it meant His coming to earth when He was born in Bethlehem; for us it means His coming at the end of time when He will serve as the Judge of the living and the dead. It was for this reason that the Lord put into the mouth of Malachi these memorable words: “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me” (3:1).

It is evident to us that he speaks here about John the Baptist, who was to prepare the way for the Savior. But then he says pointedly, “And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.” That Lord is Jesus Himself.

He continues in Chapter 3,

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment (3:5) ... From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you (3:7) ... Bring the full tithe into the storehouse... And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need” (3:10).

Thus ends the book of the last messenger of the Old Testament. The windows of heaven are ready to open. My prayer is that you have been as richly blessed as I have by this journey through the Old Testament. God bless you as you continue your studies.



God, through His prophet, continues by promising that those who live in His way will see the results of their faith. In 3:16, we read in effect, “And I will prepare a book of remembrance of all those who love my name. They shall be mine on that day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not. You will also know that it is truly worthwhile to serve the Lord in an honorable way.”

Continuing in Chapter 4, Malachi says, “The day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble...It will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” [Sun of Righteousness-KJV]. Thus, in foretelling the coming of Christ, Malachi ended the message that God had given him for the people. (See also Malachi 4:5).

CONCLUSION

Probably at this point, you are overwhelmed by the things that the prophet Malachi covered in his book. You will need to read this book a few times before you get the full impact of it. What Malachi says is essential to our life today, for our world is so much like the world of his day. His was an age of spiritual indifference, when the hearts of people were turned more and more away from God to their own selfish gratification. Let us hold firm to our faith and to our conviction that the Lord has worked in us.

*“Return to me and I will
return to you...”*

*[See] if I will not open the
windows of heaven...and
pour down for you a blessing
until there is no more need.”*

Thus ends the book of the last messenger of the Old Testament. The windows of heaven are ready to open. My prayer is that you have been as richly blessed as I have by this journey through the Old Testament. God bless you as you continue your studies.

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