

2004
West Virginia Christian
Lectures

October 10 - 14, 2004

Great People
of the Bible

Published by

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GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

"Great People of the Bible "

Hear The Saving Gospel – Romans 1:16-17, 10:17

Believe That Jesus Is The Christ – John 8:24; Acts 8:37

Repent Of Sin – Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9

Confess Jesus As Christ – Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

Be Baptized (Immersed) Into Christ For The Remission Of Sins

Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:37-38; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Peter 3:20-21

Arise And Walk In Newness Of Life In Worship and Service

Romans 6:3-5; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 2:10

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for every good cause.*

August 23, 2004

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Times of Services

Sunday:	Bible Study	10:00 A.M.
	Worship	10:45 A.M.
	Worship	6:00 P.M.
Wednesday:	Bible Study	7:00 P.M.

Lectureship Schedule

Sunday, October 10

10:00 AM	The Great I AM	David Powell
11:00	I AM The Good Shepherd	David Powell
12:00	Lunch	
6:00 PM	I AM The Vine	David Powell

Monday, October 11

10:00 AM	Abraham	Steve Snider
11:00	Gideon	Brent Gallagher
11:00 Ladies	Deborah	Janie Gallagher
12:00	Lunch	
1:00 PM	Joseph	Terry Jones
2:00	Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack, Abed-nego	Dan Kessinger
3:00	Peter	Roger Rush
4:00	Supper	
6:30	Singing	
7:00	I AM The Way	David Powell

Tuesday, October 12

10:00 AM	Moses	D. Gene West
11:00	Mordecai	Randy Cook
11:00 Ladies	Esther	Beth Cook
12:00	Lunch	
1:00 PM	Elijah	Frank Higginbotham
2:00	Jeremiah	Phil Gear
3:00	Timothy	Will Montgomery
4:00	Supper	
6:30	Singing	
7:00	I AM The Truth	David Powell

Wednesday, October 13

10:00 AM	David	Aaron Snider
11:00	Samuel	John Board
11:00 Ladies	Hannah	Brenna Board
12:00	Lunch	
1:00 PM	Elisha	Bobby Jennings
2:00	Andrew	Nicholas Deiger
3:00	John	Peter Ray Cole
4:00	Supper	
6:30	Singing	
7:00	I AM The Life	David Powell

Thursday, October 14

10:00 AM	Solomon	Melvin Rogers
11:00	Joshua	Andy Miller
11:00 Ladies	Ruth	Stephanie Miller
12:00	Lunch	
1:00 PM	Nehemiah	Andy Robison
2:00	Paul	Albert Farley
3:00	John the Baptist	Ben Jones
4:00	Supper	
6:30	Singing	
7:00	I AM The Resurrection	David Powell

Table of Contents

Lectureship Schedule	4
Preface	6
Sunday	
The Great I AM <i>David Powell</i>	7
I AM The Good Shepherd <i>David Powell</i>	15
I AM The Vine <i>David Powell</i>	23
Monday	
Abraham <i>Steve Snider</i>	31
Gideon <i>Brent Gallagher</i>	39
Deborah <i>Janie Gallagher</i>	45
Joseph <i>Terry Jones</i>	49
Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack, Abed-Nego <i>Dan Kessinger</i>	53
Peter <i>Roger Rush</i>	67
I AM The Way <i>David Powell</i>	71
Tuesday	
Moses <i>D. Gene West</i>	79
Mordecai <i>Randy Cook</i>	85
Esther <i>Beth Cook</i>	91
Elijah <i>Frank Higginbotham</i>	99
Jeremiah <i>Phil Gear</i>	105
Timothy <i>Will Montgomery</i>	111
I AM The Truth <i>David Powell</i>	117
Wednesday	
David <i>Aaron Snider</i>	127
Samuel <i>John Board</i>	131
Hannah <i>Brenna Board</i>	139
Elisha <i>Bobby Jennings</i>	145
Andrew <i>Nicholas Deiger</i>	151
John <i>Peter Ray Cole</i>	155
I AM The Life <i>David Powell</i>	159
Thursday	
Solomon <i>Melvin Salal Rogers</i>	167
Joshua <i>Andy Miller</i>	173
Ruth <i>Stephanie Miller</i>	179
Nehemiah <i>Andy Robison</i>	183
Paul <i>Albert Farley</i>	189
John The Baptist <i>Ben Jones</i>	197
I AM The Resurrection <i>David Powell</i>	203
Biographies	213

Preface

As we bring these assigned lessons and submitted manuscripts together for this, the 2004 edition of the West Virginia Christian Lectureship book, we do so with an increased awareness of the seriousness of our task and with the earnest prayer that God will bless our feeble efforts - as writers and speakers - to faithfully present these great characters of the Bible.

It is my joy to be associated with the Pumpkin Center church of Christ in this lectureship. I appreciate the elders of this congregation for their oversight of this work. I appreciate their wisdom to schedule these lectures and for their selection of this great theme. I appreciate their plans and preparations - and their commitment of the financial resources of this congregation to enable these lectures to become a reality.

I appreciate brother Nick Deiger for his good directorship of these lectures. We also appreciate Nick's work in Russia and his many years of labor with West Virginia Christian Youth Camp.

We appreciate the wonderful work done by the members of this congregation in connection with this week of lectures. Thank you. You have worked hard in getting the facilities of the church ready, in getting the lectureship books ready for distribution, and in preparing and serving the delicious meals each day.

I thank my wife, Nancy, for faithfully proofreading these articles for grammatical purposes. Special thanks to Lester Headley, of the Salem congregation, who worked so diligently in opening, feeding, "jogging," and packaging 100,000+ pages of the copies of this book. Also, we thank Jim and Linda Farley of the Crum congregation who printed 27,500 pages of the copies of this book.

This volume is our fifth lectureship book:

1. Mannington Church of Christ: *"Thus Saith The Lord"* (2000)
2. Martinsburg Church of Christ: *"A Plea For The Fundamentals"* (2001)
3. Martinsburg Church of Christ: *"Give Me The Bible"* (2002)
4. Pennsboro Church of Christ: *"Christianity: The Hope Of The World."* (2003)
5. Pumpkin Center Church of Christ: *"Great People Of The Bible."* (2004)

It is our purpose and goal to provide free copies of this book to all families who attend the lectures.

The Greatest Character of the Bible (with the manifest exception of God, the Father, 1 Corinthians 15:27) is, of course, Jesus Christ. Because of His Greatness, we rejoice that seven lectures are devoted to Him. "Unto him (God) be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Ephesians 3:21)

- Albert E. Farley, editor

THE GREAT I AM

David Powell

Overcoming the Fear Factor

Exodus 3 & 4

Objective: Because God is the Great I Am, we can be all that He wants us to be.

Introduction:

1. There are those in life who think they can, but cannot; and those who think they cannot, but can (as we will see illustrated in our text).
 - a. The first group represents the problem of self-reliance.
 - b. The second group realizes their reliance upon God.
 - c. In other words: without God, I am nothing, but with God I can be everything He desires me to be.

2. Moses represents this second classification.
 - a. God spoke to Moses from the burning bush at Mt. Sinai¹ saying:

“Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” Ex 3:11
 - b. Moses continually demonstrated his lack of self-sufficiency by responding...
 - “Who am I that I should go... (Ex 3:10).”

¹ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright (C) 1962 by Moody Press: “Horeb is called the mountain of God by anticipation. In the OT Horeb and Sinai are used as equivalent terms, although the former name may refer to the range of mountains and Sinai to a particular peak. It is impossible to know with certainty which of the many peaks, the highest rising to some 8,000 feet, is the place where Moses met God.”

- “I am not eloquent but I am slow at speech and slow of tongue (Ex 4:10).”
 - "... please send whomever else You may send (Ex 4:13)."
- c. While we often criticize Moses for his excuse making, we do appreciate the fact that he did not possess the attitude of self-reliance.
- d. For Moses to become the great servant that he became, he had to first come to the realization of the **GREAT I AM**.
3. Only when we know Who God is can we truly be what God would have us to be.
4. Apart from God, man...
- the pursuer, loses his purpose
 - the worker, loses his greatest motivation.
 - of weakness, loses his greatest strength
 - the sinner, loses his source of salvation
 - the sufferer, loses his sense of stability.
 - the beggar, loses contact with the Great Giver.
 - the mortal, loses all hope.
5. Knowing Who God is will change who you are!

Body: In our text we learn, with Moses, of the GREAT I AM.

- I. THE PRESENCE OF GOD: God said to Moses, “I will certainly be with you.”-Exodus 3:12.
- A. God’s presence is always with His faithful servants.
- He is before us - Ex 13:21.
 - God is beneath us - Deut 33:27.
 - God is around us - Ps 125:2.
 - He is behind us - Is 30:21.
 - He is with us – Is 41:10-13.
 - God is above us – Eph 4:6.
 - God is in us - Col 1:27.
- B. Such provides strength for service.

1. God has never asked us to do anything apart from His presence.
 - a. Even the Great Commission carries the promise of God's presence - Mt 28:20.
 - b. I heard the story told of Brother Goodpasture: As the day was closing and the sun was sitting, B. C. Goodpaster's father instructed him to go fetch a pail of water from the steam. As a lad he was filled with fear as he imagined snakes lying along the pathway. Realizing the boy's fear, Mr. Goodpasture said: "Get two pails, I'm going with you!" Such, said B. C., changed things.

2. Paul knew what the presence of God meant as he was to stand before Caesar -2 Tm 4:16-18 (see Heb 13:5-6).

II. THE PERSON OF GOD: Tell Them "I **AM WHO I AM.**" - Exodus 3:14.

- A. Hardeman Nichols comments on this phrase:

The Egyptians had infected the children of Israel with their pagan gods, and with the knowledge of that fact, Moses said, "Who shall I say sent me?" God's answer should have been good news to the Hebrews: "**I AM THAT I AM.**" He is the Self-existent One. He is not dependent upon any source for his being or power. If He had said, "I was," it may mean He existed for a time; or if he said, "I will be," it would have suggested a beginning. Eternal truths are placed in the present tense to emphasize there is no beginning nor end. Since God is eternal, he is self-sufficient and all-sufficient: the **GREAT I AM.**²

- B Two imperatives must be met before we can meaningfully worship and serve the **GREAT I AM.**
 1. First imperative: We must know God--answers the question

² Hardeman Nichols, MOSES: Excuses, Excuses (Exodus 3-4), *Studies in Exodus* (The 23rd Annual Lectureship of East Tennessee School of Preaching, 1997), page 46.

of the WHO of worship.

- a. Only when we know the WHO of God can our worship be acceptable - Jn 4:22.

The way people worship reveals much about their mentalities. Young people often whisper, giggle, and wiggle during worship which reveals an immature mind. Unfortunately adults often appear to be in la-la-land during the worship of God which demonstrates a lack of mental engagement. Possibly some adults suffer with ADD (Attention Deficient Disorder). Others, I fear, can be labeled as JNI (Just Not Interested). Medication treats ADD; knowledge of Who God is treats JNI.

- b. Paul told the Athenians, who worshiped many gods, about the One, True, and Living God - Ac 17:23.

2. Second Imperative: We must love God-- answers the question of the WHY of worship.

- a. Tom Holland writes:
One cannot worship a God whom she/he does not know. But one will not want to worship a God he/she does not love. The first imperative of worship is to know God. The second imperative grows out of the first: to really know God is to genuinely love God and people who love God want to demonstrate devotion, want to show honor, desire to adore, and magnify the Lord.³
- b. Some worship out the fear factor, others to please people, some to do duty--true worshipers worship because they love God.
- c. David demonstrates the desire to worship.

David knew God: “Praise the LORD, for *the LORD is*

³ Thomas H Holland, *Man's Worship to God* (Brentwood, TN Penman Publications, 1994), page 29.

good; Sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant (vs. 3)... For **I know** that **the LORD is great**, And our **Lord is above all gods** (vs. 5).”

David loved God: **"I love** the LORD, because He has heard My voice and my supplications" (Ps 116:1). **"I love** Your commandments" (Ps 119:127). "Oh, how I **love** Your law!" (Ps 119:97). **"I love** Your testimonies" (Ps 119:119). **"I love** Your precepts" (Ps 119: 159).

David sums up his knowledge and love: "I will call upon the Lord, who is **worthy to be praised...**" (Ps 18:3). David declared: **"I was glad** when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Ps 122:1).

[When we know the WHO and WHY of worship the HOW will follow (spirit and in truth). Moses was told to take off his footwear because the place where he stood was sacred ground.]

III. THE PROMISE OF GOD: "I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites..." - Exodus 3:17.

A. We live in a day of broken promises.
Salesmen have their *"be backs!"* People say as they are leaving the sales floor or sales lot—"I'll be back." Rarely do they come back. God, however, never lies--such is an impossibility.

B Will Moses believe God?

1. There is a real difference in *believing in God* and *believing God* as demonstrated through Abram.

God promised Abraham that through Isaac he would have descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea. God later told Abram to offer Isaac as a burnt sacrifice. Abram, without question, set out to carry out God's command. What was Abram thinking as he hiked the mountain of sacrifice? He believed that God would raise up Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:19). The New Testament records *"Abraham believed God"*

2. Do we believe in the promises of God?
 - Do you believe that you reap what you sow?
 - Do you believe that all things work together for good to those that love the Lord?
 - Do you believe that God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked.

IV. THE PROTECTION OF GOD “So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders...” - Exodus 3:20.

- A. That which is seen is not faith.
- B. Moses had seen the power of Pharaoh’s army.
 1. Now he must rely on God’s protection.
 2. He must “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7).

V. THE PEOPLE OF GOD: “And I will give this people (Israelites) favor in the sight of the Egyptians...” - Exodus 3:21.

- A. God will reveal to the Israelites that they are his special people.
- B. We need to be reminded that we are God’s “special (favored) people” for such knowledge will result in zeal for good works - Tit 2:11-15
- C. Moses needed to realize that he too was special.

VI. THE PROVISIONS OF GOD: “. . . and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed.” - Exodus 3:21.

- A. If we are honest we will admit that we have all wasted time and energy with worry (worry comes from a term meaning “to choke.”)
- B. Experts reveal that much energy is wasted through worry.

- 40% will never happen.
- 30% has already happened.
- 12% are health concerns.
- 10% of the tings
- 8% are actual concerns.

- C. Jesus tells us not to worry, but to trust - Mt 6:25-34
- D. Know this: The God of heaven is a God who takes care of His special people -- we sing ***“God Will Take Care of You.”***⁴

VII. THE PROOF OF GOD - “Then Moses answered and said, ‘But suppose they will not believe me...’ ” - Exodus 4:1.

- A. Moses was assured that sufficient proof would be given so that his message would be believed - Ex 4:1-9.
- B. God’s word would be confirmed through three “signs.”
1. Rod became a serpent, and the serpent turned back into a *rod--this was demonstrated to Moses.*
 2. Moses’ hand became leprous when he placed it in his bosom, this hand became like his other flesh when he removed it from his bosom a second *time--this was also demonstrated to Moses.*
 3. Water dipped from river and poured over dry land would become *blood--this was not demonstrated to Moses indicating a progression of Moses' faith.*

⁴ W. S. Martin.

VIII. THE POWER OF GOD: God demonstrated proof of His power to Moses
- Exodus 3:1-9.

- A. Through the things that we see in the created universe: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” - Rm 1:20.
- B. God’s power leaves us without an excuse.
- C. Moses, learning of the presence, person, promise, protection, people, provisions, proof, and power of **THE GREAT I AM** was without excuse.

Conclusion:

1. These facts changed a “*But Moses*” (Ex 3:11) to a “*So Moses*” (4:18).
2. Knowing God can change you, too.

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

David R. Powell

Solace for the Sheep

John 10:1-6

Objective: The good Shepherd gives solace to His sheep.

Introduction:

1. *Shepherd.*¹
 - a. A person who takes care of sheep.
 - b. Shepherds in the Old Testament:
 - 1) Abel is the first shepherd mentioned in the Bible (Gen 4:2). 2) Kings who led Israel (Jer 6:3; 49:19) and certain other leaders (Jer 23:4) are referred to as shepherds 3) The sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were shepherds (Gen 13 7, 26 20, 30:36). 4) Rachel was a shepherdess (Gen 29:3). 5) David (2 Sam 5 2, Ps 78 70-72), 6) Moses (Ex 3:1), 7) and Amos (Amos 11) found herding to be excellent preparation for future leadership roles.
 - c. Figuratively, the Old Testament pictures God as Israel's Shepherd-Leader (Ps 80:1; Ezek 34:14).
 - d. Jesus, in the New Testament, identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd: "I am the Good Shepherd."
2. *Sheep.* A few helpful things to know about sheep.

Sheep are mentioned more frequently in the Bible than any other animal--about 750 times. Sheep of Syria and Palestine are characterized by the possession of an enormous fat tail which weighs many pounds.² They were well-suited for Palestine's dry plains as they could go for long periods without water. The sheep of Palestine were probably brown or a mixture of black and white.

¹ Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c) 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² The Hebrews called this "the whole fat tail." When they offered this prized part of the sheep as a burnt offering to God, they burned the "entire fat-tail cut off close by the spine" (Lev 3:9).

Sheep, by nature, are helpless creatures. They depend on shepherds to lead them to green pastures and still waters. They depend on shepherds to fight off wild beasts with their rod, and to pull them back upon the pathway with their staff when they stumble. Lacking a sense of direction the sheep rely upon shepherds to lead them lest they wander off and fall into a crevice or get caught in a thorn bush. They depend upon shepherds to prepare a place for them to pasture. They depend upon the shepherd to anoint them with oil after a snake bite or cut obtained while grazing among thorns.

3. That Jesus is the Good Shepherd should bring solace (comfort) to the sheep of His fold - Jn 10:1-16.
4. From the above paragraph let us view the (1) **distinction** (10:1-6) between the shepherd and the stranger, (2) the **declaration** of Jesus--"I am the Good Shepherd," (3) the **description** of Jesus as our Shepherd.

Body:

- I. DISTINCTION: Shepherd As Opposed to the Stranger - John 10:1-6.

A. *Stranger*: He does not enter through the door, but sneaks in another way.

The Sheepfold under consideration was the communal or common fold. This type of sheepfold was a permanent enclosure usually of stone providing protection and shelter for the sheep by night. Shepherds would lead the sheep out during the day and return them to the fold by night. The fold would be utilized by various shepherds, thus it was a shared fold. A doorkeeper would stand guard during the night hours until the shepherd came and called his sheep out from the other sheep of the fold. A common problem in Palestine was for thieves and robbers to attempt to sneak into the fold by climbing over the wall in an effort to steal the sheep.

B. *Shepherd*: Enters through the door.

1. When Jesus came on the scene, He was upfront and honest.
 - a. He “came in the volume of the book.” - Hb 10:7
 - b. He came according to Old Testament prophecy.

2. Prophets prophesied of the coming of the Shepherd.
 - a. Isaiah 40:11: “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.”
 - b. Ezekiel 34:23: “I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them--My servant David (reference to Christ). He shall feed them and be their shepherd.”
 - c. Micah 5:2 & 4: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel ... And He shall stand and feed His flock ...”
 - d. Zechariah 13:7: “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion,’ Says the LORD of hosts. ‘Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones.’”

3. Jesus entered through this prophetic door.
 - a. The doorkeeper, possibly a reference to John the

Baptist, said of Jesus: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” – Jn 3:30.

- b. Jesus entered through this door stating: “I am the Good Shepherd.”

II. DECLARATION: “I Am... - John 10:7-11a.

- A. “I am the door of the sheep” - Jn 10:7-10.

- 1. *Sheepfold*

The sheepfold (representative of the church) only had one door. Had there been multiple doors it would have increased the danger of strangers entering in and stealing the sheep. Jesus declares: “I am the door.” Jesus is the means by which the sheep enter into salvation.

- 2. *Scriptures:* The Scriptures clearly clarify that Jesus is the only means to salvation.

- a. John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

- b. Acts 10 43: “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”

- c. Acts 4:12: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

- d. Ephesians 2:18: “For through Him we both have

access by one Spirit to the Father.”

3. *Strangers:*

- a. Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”
- b. Such modern day strangers could be identified as Mohammed, Sun Myung Moon, Joseph Smith, John Calvin, Mary Baker Eddy, Ellen G. White, J. F. Rutherford, and Charles T. Russell.
- c. Many means are used by these strangers such as the sinners prayer, altar call, being voted in, sprinkled, poured—but Jesus is the only door (means) of entry into the fold of God.

B. “I am the Good Shepherd.” - Jn 10:11a.

1. Jesus has provided us with an illustration, explanation, and now the application.
2. What qualifies Jesus as the Good Shepherd?

III. DESCRIPTION: Three Aspects of Jesus’ Shepherding that Qualifies Him as the Good Shepherd - John 10:11b-16.

A. *Sacrificial shepherd* - Jn 10:11b-13.

1. A hireling flees when danger approaches; whereas the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.
 - a. Jesus’ death was not accidental but predetermined:

“Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.” - Ac 2:23.

b. Jesus could have called more than twelve legions of angels. -Matthew 26:47-53:

2. A hireling watches over someone else’s sheep (he does not own the sheep); the Good Shepherd watches over His purchased possession--we have been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus.
3. The actions of the hireling scattered the sheep, but the actions of the Good Shepherd gather the sheep.

B. *Personal shepherd* - Jn 10:14-15.

1. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep by name.
2. We sing: "Does Jesus care... O yes, He cares; I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief, When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares."³
3. The very hairs of our head are numbered.

C. *Universal shepherd* - Jn 10:16.

1. Other sheep.
 - a. Gentiles would be gathered into the fold.
 - b. Ephesians 3:6: “that the Gentiles should be fellow

³ Written by Frank E. Graeff

heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise
in Christ through the Gospel.”

2. One flock (church).
3. One shepherd (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Conclusion:

1. Jesus is the Good Shepherd.
2. Will you hear his voice?
3. *"Jesus, the Loving Shepherd,"* By W. A. Ogden.

I AM THE VINE

David R. Powell

John 15:1-8

Objective: Branches that abide in the vine are blessed.

Introduction:

1. As the Master Teacher, Jesus used the familiar to make spiritual applications.
 - a. It is no wonder that in a land where 60% of its agriculture was devoted to vineyards that Jesus would use the vine as an illustration.¹
 - b. We read of this illustration in chapter fifteen.
2. There are times in life when motivating words are needed.
 - a. When it is the bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, your team is behind by four runs, there are two outs, and you are up to bat--such is a good time for some encouraging words.
 - b. You are days away from your wedding day, the pressures are mounting as you are about to take a major step--such is a time for some encouraging words.
 - c. Your spouse of many years has departed in death and left you alone -
- such is a time for some encouraging words.

¹ Ken Willis, "The Vine And The Branches," John, edited by William S. Cline (6th Annual Firm Foundation Lectureship, Ridgedale church of Christ, Chattanooga, TN: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1989), page 299.

3. The apostles of Jesus need encouraging words.
 - a. It is the night before Jesus' death.
 - b. He gathers with the apostles in an upper room for the purpose of observing the Passover meal.
 - c. After Judas' departure from the scene, Jesus again tells His disciples of His impending departure from them.

John 13:33: Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you.

John 13:36: Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward."

John 14:1-3: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

4. Don't we all, in a world of problems, need some encouraging words?
 - a. Bob Spurlin, a Gospel preacher who is now bed ridden, recently asked various Christians to help him financially by purchasing a book he wrote titled, *Don't' Ever Give Up!* The book lists the following problems that we face and provides encouraging words for those experiencing such.

Human Suffering	Coping with Loneliness
Loss of a Spouse	Disorderly Children
Loss of a Child	Troubles of the Modern Family
Bedridden Condition	Financial Problems.
Being a Caregiver	Addictions

- b. Our text serves as an encouraging word from our Lord - Jn 15 1-8
5. We can decipher Jesus' intense and enlightening illustration by viewing the ...
- a. *Metaphor* itself
 - b. The *mandate*: "Abide in Me!"
 - c. And the *motive* for abiding.

Body:

- I. METAPHOR Four Figures - John 15:1-3.
 - A. Jesus is the vine.
 - 1. This paragraph could be classified by the following illustrative techniques.
 - a. *Parable*: While this paragraph is not identified as a parable, and while there are no parables in the book of John, it does explain the unfamiliar by laying it alongside the familiar. Many interpreters would have no problem calling this paragraph a parable.
 - b. *Allegory*: An allegory is a story in which various figures of the story are representative such as in the parable of the Sower or Soils which is both a parable and allegory.
 - c. *Metaphor*: Unlike a simile,² a metaphor is more direct -

² *Simile* comes from the Latin term "*similes*," which means likeness.

- Jesus is not **like** (simile) a vine, He **is** (metaphor) the vine.

2. Only in the vine can a branch *live, love* (“abide in my love” - 15:9), and *last*.

Ken Willis writes:

In every plant there is a trunk, or vine, from which the branches grow and on which fruit is produced. Flowing and circulating in the plant is what we know as sap. In the plant’s circulatory system, the sap rises through the vine, into the branches, causing a bud to appear, then to blossom, and finally fruit. Farmers understand this. In the spring they speak of the sap rising, and in the Fall of sap falling. Sap is a life-current beneath the bark bringing life, growth, and fruit.³

B. Our Father is the vinedresser.

1. The vinedresser is in charge of caring for the vine.
2. In caring for the vine, the vinedresser utilizes the pruning procedure.
 - a. I’m told that some vineyards train a person for two to three years before they turn them loose on a vine.
 - b. A vinedresser must know *where* to cut, *when* to cut, *how* much to cut, and *what* angle to make the cut, and *why* they need to make the cut.
3. Why? There are two reasons for pruning.

³ Ken Willis, “The Vine And The Branches,” John, edited by William S. Cline (6th Annual Firm Foundation Lectureship, Ridgedale church of Christ, Chattanooga, TN: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1989), page 300.

- a. Improve the *quality* of the fruit - vs. 2a.

Dead branches can breed disease and entice insects, jeopardizing fruitfulness. Nonproductive branches take strength away from the productive branches limiting their growth.

- b. Improve the *quantity* of the fruit - vs. 2b.

If you could ask the vine if it enjoys being pruned, the answer would be a resounding NO! Though pruning hurts us, it ultimately helps us to be more fruitful: “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” - Heb 12:11. Even productive branches are pruned to help them become more productive. A family had an old grapevine behind their farm house. The arbor had deteriorated, and the vine was looking unhealthy. They decided to destroy the vine by cutting it down at the base. The next year they had the best harvest ever.

- 4. Instrument used by God for the pruning is the word - vs. 3.

C. Jesus’ disciples are the branches -- branches can be utilized in two ways.

- 1. They can bear.
- 2. They can burn.

II. MANDATE: “Abide in Me” - John 15 4-6

A. *Directive*: “Abide in Me” - John 15:4-6.

- 1. During tornados, people find safe places to wait out the storm.
- 2. In the Bible, we find that safety demands we be in an appointed place.

3. For all spiritual blessings, we must be “in Christ.” - Eph 1:3.
4. This text destroys the doctrine of once saved always saved.
5. This text calls for personal responsibility in abiding.

B *Definition:*

1. “*Abide*” (3306) "comes from meno (men'-o); a primary verb; to stay (in a given place, state, relation or expectancy): KJV abide, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand, tarry ..."4
2. The idea of the impossibility of apostasy is here disputed.
3. Abiding is an action that we are individually responsible for.
4. We abide in Christ by keeping His commandments – John 15:10.

C. *Demonstration.*

Judas Iscariot has departed the scene. His life is described by tragedy, despair, and hopelessness. He ends it in suicide. Such is the result of those who do not remain in the Vine. Life in Christ is an abundant life. Jesus said: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10b).

IV. MOTIVE - John 15:7-8.

A. Prayers are answered.

1. *Anxiety:* Remember that the eleven are troubled by the knowledge of Jesus’ departure (Jn 14:1).

⁴ BibleSoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, BibleSoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.

2. *Antidote for anxiety.*
 1. Prayer is the antidote for anxiety.
 2. Those in the Vine can communicate with their creator.

Fred A. Mosley observed:

Suppose the earth were reduced to the size of the period at the end of a printed sentence; that is to a diameter of only one-fiftieth of an inch. Suppose everything else in the universe was strung proportionately on that microscopic scale with the earth the size of a period. The sun would then be nineteen and one half feet away. The nearest star would be 1,005 miles away. The furthest galaxy of stars would be almost 82 billion miles away.⁵

3. Such confidence is only in Christ - 1 Jn 5:14-15.

B. God is glorified.

1. Viktor E. Frankl, a noted psychologist and survivor of German concentration camps, writes of a widespread phenomenon called "the existential vacuum."

This is a reference to the lack of meaning that many experience in life. Dr. Frankl, as a result of a statistical survey, concludes that 60 percent of American students experience the existential vacuum. He adds that it often manifests itself "mainly in a state of boredom."⁶ Frankl has a form of therapy called "logotherapy." *Logos* is the Greek word denoting "meaning." Frankl attempts to help people find meaning in life.

2. Right here we have the solution for man--meaning in life can only be found in the True Vine.

⁵ Fred A. Mosley, "The Duty and Privilege of Prayer," (Date unknown), *Gospel Advocate*.

⁶ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Published by Simon & Schuster, 1984), page 111.

3. What greater purpose can one achieve than fearing God and keeping His commandments (Ecl 12:13.)
- C. We become more fruitful.
1. Six times in these eight verses Jesus uses the word “fruit.”
 2. Note verse five: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” - Jn 15:5.
- D Declared a disciple.
1. There will be a day of declaration.
 2. Our relationship with the Vine is what will make the determination as to where we spend eternity.

Conclusion:

1. In this lesson we have viewed ...
 - a. The metaphor.
 - b. The mandate.
 - c. And the motive.
2. Two sights are common at a vineyard (Which represents you?)
 - a. Vats where the grapes are stored.
 - b. And brush piles that are ready to be burned.

ABRAHAM

Steve Snider

There may not be any more prominent character in the Old Testament than the man we are to consider in this study. Abraham's character and his position as head of the Jewish nation gives him an important place in the scriptures, both Old and New Testaments.

Abraham is an historic person! In spite of all that modernists might say, the evidence is clear that Abraham was a real person. In Gen. 12 God makes the famous covenant with Abraham, a covenant which becomes the foundation of God's relationship to Israel.

“Now the Lord had said to Abram: Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
(Gen.12:1-3)

Any time there is a covenant at least three things are involved: parties, terms, and promises. In this great covenant the parties are God and Abraham; the terms are Abraham must leave his country and his family and go to a land that God would show him; the promises are God would make a great nation from Abraham, and, through Abraham, all nations of the earth would be blessed. Notice how important this covenant God made with Abraham is throughout the Bible!

1. This promise is repeated several times in the book of Genesis.
(Gen.15:3-6; 17:1-7; 22:16,17)
2. The promise is repeated to his son Isaac (Gen.26:1-5) and then to his son Jacob. (Gen.28:13,14)
3. In Exodus 2 God hears the groaning of His people in Egypt and remembers His covenant with Abraham. “So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” (Ex.2:24)
4. In Ex.32 Moses pleads with God to spare the people and makes that appeal based on the covenant that God made with Abraham. (32:13)

5. When Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal, he sought God's help by appealing to the covenant that God had entered into with Abraham. (1 Kings 18:36)
6. Jehoshaphat sought deliverance from his enemies by praying to God and reminding God that He had promised the land to Abraham, "your friend forever." (2 Chronicles 20:7) To my knowledge Abraham is the only one in the Bible referred to in this way.
7. In Isa.51:2 the people of God are admonished to "look to Abraham your father ...for I called him alone and blessed and increased him."
8. When we then come to the New Testament, we immediately learn that the Messiah would come through the lineage of Abraham. (Matt.1:1)
9. Abraham is then held up before Christians today as an example of faith and obedience: (Rom.4:3; James 2:21-24)
10. The New Testament makes it clear that the covenant God made with Abraham was ultimately fulfilled with the coming of Christ and the establishment of the His church. The real children of Abraham are those who have the faith of Abraham. (Gal.3:26-29)

In considering the life of Abraham there are a variety of areas that one could study and discuss. In this lesson we would like to focus our attention on the attitude of submission and surrender that was demonstrated by this great servant of God. A person cannot study the life of Abraham without realizing that he was a man who was willing to surrender to the desires of his God.

The word "surrender" means to "yield to the power of another, or to give up possession of something upon compulsion or demand." It can also mean to relinquish. There can be no doubting that Abraham surrendered to the will of God. Abraham yielded up his life to the power of God and gave up many things in his life because it was the desire of God for him to do so. We want to notice just a few of the things that Abraham "surrendered" in his desire to follow the commandments of God.

Abraham Surrendered His Country.

We have already noticed the covenant God made with Abraham in Gen.12:1-3. Abraham's willingness to do as God commanded becomes even more impressive when we notice Heb.11:8 in conjunction with Gen.12. There we are told that Abraham went out not knowing where he was going! He simply knew that God wanted him to go! It is my understanding that it was about 1300 miles from his homeland to the land where God would lead him, yet Abraham surrendered his country and made the journey.

If we hope to live lives that are pleasing to God today, we need to learn from this act of submission on the part of Abraham. We must come to understand that we too as Christians are expected to surrender our country. Notice the words of Paul in Col.3:1-4 where Christians are told to “seek those things which are above” and to “set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth.” If we are going to be men and women of faith we must be prepared to surrender our attachment to this world and the things of this world. We may not be called upon to physically leave our homeland (or we may), but we must be prepared to focus our attention on “those things that are above.”

John would write, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him." (1 John 2:15) Paul would remind Christians at Philippi, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (3:20) Peter would remind his readers that we are pilgrims and sojourners on this earth. (1 Pet.2:11)

I don't think that any careful observer would deny that part of the problem that Christians and the church of our Lord are experiencing today is rooted in our attachment to this world and the things of this world. We must come to understand that when we make the decision to become children of God our goal is to reach that city whose “builder and maker is God.” (Heb.11:10) We need to remember that Jesus said of his apostles that even though they were in the world, they were not of the world. (John 17:15,16)

Are we prepared to surrender to God? Are we prepared to put to death our members “which are on the earth” (Col.3:5) and seek out that new country that God has waiting for us? Do we have the kind of faith that Abraham had; a faith that will trust God to lead us to that new home?

Abraham Surrendered His Family.

This makes surrendering a little more difficult doesn't it! Not only did God tell Abraham to leave his homeland, but He also instructed Abraham to leave his family. Gen.12:4 tells us that Abraham departed as the Lord had spoken to him. What a challenge to the faith of Abraham this had to be. Not only was God asking him to leave behind his homeland, but He was also asking him to leave behind family as well.

For those who were not privileged to grow up in a Christian home, this truth can be more easily understood. I'm sure, however, that many in the body of Christ have had the experience of trying to teach someone the precious gospel of Christ and have that person refuse to obey it because of his or her

family. Family can be a very difficult obstacle to overcome in making a decision to truly surrender to God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus knew that this was going to be the case. In Matt.10:35-37 we read,

“For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

These are strong words, but our Lord knew that, with the coming of the kingdom, there would be trouble among earthly families. Jesus knew that Christianity would be so despised by some that it would tear families apart. It seems strange to many, but how true are the words of Jesus that, sometimes, our greatest enemies are those of our own families. We do, however, have Bible examples of this: Joseph and his brothers, Ahab and his wife Jezebel, Job’s wife, and even the fleshly brothers of Jesus as seen in John 7:5.

As difficult as it may be at times, if we are going to surrender to God, we must impress upon our families that in our lives God is always first. (Matt.6:33) We must impress upon them that nothing, not even family, is going to prevent us from worshipping God and serving God to the best of our ability. This certainly does not mean that we can ignore our family, because that would not be pleasing to God; it simply means that we must not allow even family to interfere with our faithfulness to God.

Abraham Surrendered His Own Wisdom and Judgment.

Remember the passage in Heb.11:8 that tells us that Abraham went out not knowing where he was going. This took a tremendous amount of faith in God. It also means that he had to set aside his own wisdom and judgment because no one using his own wisdom and judgment would do that.

Most of us have people in this world that we trust and have a great deal of confidence in. But if they called you and told you to sell your home because you were going to want to move, would you do that without more information? Even if they assured you that it was a good thing and they felt sure that you would want to make the move, I venture that most of us would not do it without knowing where we were actually going. Abraham, however, knew that he was dealing with God, and he was willing to trust God and surrender his wisdom and simply do as God commanded.

This is such an important truth when it comes to following God. God would say through the prophet Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa.55:8,9)

Paul warns us that a refusal to surrender our wisdom would cause many in the world to refuse to obey the gospel of Christ. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor.1:18) The Holy Spirit knew that many would not be able to surrender their own wisdom and judgment in following the wisdom of God. How many times have we heard someone say, “Well, that may be what the Bible says, but I think ...”? What have they done? They have set their wisdom and judgment above the wisdom and judgment of God. How many times have you heard someone say, “Well I don’t see why ... ” and then call into question something the Bible teaches we must do. Again, what have they done? They have set their own wisdom above the wisdom of God.

There are many examples in the Bible where man had to surrender his wisdom and judgment if he desired to be saved by God. Think about these examples:

1. Numbers 21—Of what medicinal value is a bronze serpent on a pole in curing a deadly snake bite?
2. 2 Kings 5—How could dipping in the river Jordan 7 times possibly cure leprosy?
3. Joshua 6—What kind of battle plan is that?

In each case, only when man was willing to surrender his own wisdom and trust in the commandments of God would he be blessed. Abraham knew this and thus was willing to set aside his wisdom and follow God’s instructions.

Abraham Surrendered His Personal Privilege.

Notice the event recorded in Gen.13:1-9. As Abraham went to the land that God was going to give him, a disagreement arose between his herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. Remember that God had promised the land to Abraham, so he could have chosen and claimed the best land for himself. He could have claimed that it was his privilege! But in the interest of peace he allowed Lot to make the first choice.

In a day and age where so many are clamoring for their “rights” and “special privileges,” how refreshing it is to read of someone who was more concerned about peace among brethren than “his rights.” Abraham understood that, in order for peace to exist and for people to live as God would

have them to live, at times our personal “likes and dislikes” need to be set aside. How many congregations of the Lord’s church have been torn apart because brethren were determined to have things “their way” regardless of the consequences? Now, we are not talking about compromising truth, or setting aside the will of God; we are talking about areas of indifference and how important it is to be able to see the large picture and not just focus on our “personal rights and privileges.” Abraham knew they were brethren and that was more important than getting “his way.”

Paul practiced this same principle throughout his ministry for Jesus Christ. He stated in 1 Cor. 9 that he had every right to receive pay from the churches, but did not do so in order to maintain peace. He also stated in this same chapter that he became “all things to all men” showing his willingness to set aside personal privileges in order to advance the cause of Christ. If we ever hope to be men and women of faith like Abraham and Paul, we must learn to set aside our personal “rights” on occasion if it means keeping peace and helping promote the work of our Lord.

Abraham Surrendered His Son.

When considering the things Abraham surrendered, this would have to be one of the greatest and most difficult sacrifices he made. Isaac had to be something that Abraham treasured as much as anything in the world. He was the son of promise, the son of his old age. In Gen,22:2 God describes Isaac as “your son, your only son, whom you love.” Certainly God knew this to be true. And yet, God told Abraham that he was to take this son and offer him as a burnt offering on Mt. Moriah.

As you read this touching account in Gen.22, your heart goes out to Abraham. Can you imagine your walking up the mountain, carrying the fire, the wood, the knife that you plan to take your son’s life with, and then hear your son ask, “... where is the sacrifice?” I honestly can’t imagine having to make that kind of decision, much less follow through with it. But, Abraham was going to surrender Isaac in order to be obedient to God.

Doesn’t it make us look foolish when we think about the things we won’t surrender in order to worship God or serve God? A favorite TV show, a weekend trip, some type of recreation, a few extra dollars for working when we don’t really have to, friends or family stopping in at worship time, etc., etc. Don’t these things seem amazingly trivial when compared with what Abraham was asked to surrender?

We know that God stopped Abraham from offering his son, but can you see in this event a shadow of what God would ultimately do for us. God would send His son to die on our behalf and there would be no stopping that plan! God surrendered His son as a sacrifice for our sins. Do we believe today that it

was any easier for God to watch what happened to His Son than it was for Abraham. Surely, God's heart was breaking as he watched His son, mocked, beaten, spit upon and finally crucified, that we might be saved. And, remember, this was God's "only son."

Abraham surrendered Isaac without knowing what God would ultimately do for mankind in the person of His Son; how can we then fail to surrender to God the things we need to surrender, being fully aware of what God has done for us!

Abraham Surrendered Without Hesitation.

Closely aligned to the above point is the truth that Abraham made these decisions, these sacrifices, without hesitation. In Gen.12 when Abraham was told to leave his homeland and family, the Bible says that Abraham went as God had told him.

In Gen.22 when Abraham was told to sacrifice his son Isaac, we are told in v.3 that he rose early in the morning. If there were ever occasions to hesitate in one's obedience to God, these would have been good occasions. Just imagine all the excuses Abraham could have come up with to delay obeying the commands of God. I would imagine that many today could not only come up with excuses for delaying, but could also easily rationalize why the commands should not be obeyed at all!

But not Abraham. He did not hesitate, but arose early in the morning to carry out the will of God. This type of surrender could have changed the eternal destiny of someone like Felix in Acts 24:25 or Agrippa in Acts 26:28.

Procrastination is not only the thief of time, but it is also the thief of souls. This is why Paul said, "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor.6:2)

Abraham Surrendered His Will

The really important point behind all these other things is that Abraham had surrendered his will to the will of God. It was this trait that made it possible for him to surrender these other things. He showed repeatedly that his life was geared to doing the will of God.

Our Savior demonstrated this same quality. As he approached the time of His arrest and crucifixion, He prayed fervently for God to remove "this cup" from Him. But He ended that prayer with humble submission by stating, "not my will but yours be done."

Paul demonstrated this same spirit while on the road to Damascus. Learning that he had been fighting against God instead of fighting for God, he cried out to Christ, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" As with Abraham, upon learning what God wanted him to do, he immediately obeyed. To show this complete surrender of will he would later write,

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal.2:20)

To be great in the kingdom of God means we must be prepared to set aside our prejudiced opinions, our selfish whims, our dreams of worldly fame and prestige, and simply surrender to the will of God. Can you imagine the impact we would have on the world if that were the attitude of all who desired to follow God? Religious division would be greatly eliminated, the great commission would come alive, and souls would be added daily to the church. Our giving would increase many fold; attendance at all services would increase; God would be glorified in a truly magnificent way.

The question is, are we willing to surrender, totally relinquish our wills to the will of God, and allow God through His word to direct us. Abraham was, Paul was, and of course the greatest example is Jesus Christ. May we be encouraged by their example to do the same.

(I am indebted to brother Franklin Camp for the main points of this lesson. S. Snider)

GIDEON

Brent Gallagher

Introduction to Judges

The book of Judges describes some dark days in Israel's history. The events of the book are sandwiched in between the conquering of the Promised Land and the selection of Saul as Israel's first king. After Israel had conquered the land of Canaan, Joshua warned the people of the necessity of serving God and the punishments which would come because of disobedience (Joshua 24:19,20). The ultimate punishment was the carrying away of Israel and Judah into Assyrian and Babylonian captivities (2 Kings 17:7-23; 2 Chronicles 36:15-19). There were other judgments of God though, where He would raise up nations to oppress Israel because of sin. The book of Judges is filled with such judgments.

A pattern can be found within Judges of sin, oppression, a cry for help, and God's sending a judge to deliver His people. For example, one reads in Judges 3:12 that "Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord . So the LORD strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD." The Israelites served Eglon eighteen years and then the Bible reads "Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and He gave them a judge – Ehud , ..." (Judges 3:15). After killing Eglon, Ehud led Israel in battle against the Moabites (Judges 3:20-29). Ehud and the Israelites were successful, and "the land had rest for eighty years" (Judges 3:30). There are six cycles of this nature found within the book.

Who were the judges? The Hebrew verb *shaphat* is normally used in the Old Testament in the sense of arbitrating or deciding between two parties. For example, forms of this word are used three times in Deuteronomy 16:18 and are translated as "judges" who are appointed who will "judge" the people with just "judgment." It is evident from this passage that *shaphat* is used in the sense of one who makes decisions or decides between two possibilities. This is the normal use of *shaphat* both before and after the period of the judges. During the period of the judges, the word is only used twice in this sense (Judges 11:27; 1 Samuel 3:13). In both of these instances, the word is used of God making judgments. *Shaphat* appears to be used in the sense of one who leads or rules during the period of the judges. This leading or ruling could involve both military and civil matters. When one thinks of the judges, he thinks of the military victories (Deborah and the Canaanites, Gideon and the Midianites, Samson and the Philistines, etc.). But one also reads of the judges "judging" during times of peace (Judges 12:7, 9, 11, 13, 14). It appears that *shaphat* is used in these instances of a ruler or leader of the people who probably would also make judgments and arbitrate disputes.

Some of the judges are described as people beset with sins and character flaws. After Gideon won a great military victory, he made an ephod which was worshipped and became a stumbling block to the Israelites (Judges 8:27). Samson was a profane person, yet he judged Israel for twenty years and gave them rest from the Philistines (Judges 16:1-31). One is reminded that God has used people of various characters to accomplish His purposes throughout the Bible. One also is reminded of the sin and wickedness which was found in Israel during the days of the judges. These were times when God's Law was not followed, and the consequences within the nation were evident.

Gideon's Call (Judges 6:1-40)

One reads in Judges 6 that Israel "did evil in the sight of the Lord" so God "delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years" (Judges 6:1). The oppression by the Midianites was great. They would raid Israel during harvest time and pillage and destroy the land. Because of this, the Israelites had to go into hiding in dens and caves. The Angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon while he was threshing wheat in a winepress (to hide it from the Midianites). The Angel of the LORD said "The LORD is with you, mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12). Gideon's response was "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?" (Judges 6:13). The Angel continued by stating that God had chosen Gideon to save Israel from Midian. Gideon's reaction was, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15). After the Angel stated that he would be with him and that Gideon would defeat the Midianites, Gideon asked for a sign. Gideon prepared a goat, unleavened bread, and broth. The angel of the LORD touched the bread and meat with his staff and fire consumed the food. At that point Gideon perceived that he truly had seen the Angel of the LORD. That night God spoke to Gideon, told him to take a bull and tear down his father's altar to Baal and build an altar to God in its place. Gideon took ten servants and obeyed God, destroying his father's altar and building one of his own. The men of the city were upset about the destruction of the altar so they approached Joash, Gideon's father, and asked for Gideon so they could kill him. Joash's response was that if Baal is a true God, he can defend himself.

After this event, the Midianites and Amalekites were encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. The Bible states that "the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. And he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them" (Judges 6:34, 35). At this point Gideon needed further reassurance. He put a fleece of wool on the ground and asked God that the next day the fleece would be wet and the ground dry. The next morning Gideon squeezed a bowlful of water out of the fleece and the ground was dry. Gideon asked God for another sign. This time he asked that the ground would be wet

and the fleece dry. The Bible says, “And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground” (Judges 6:40).

Gideon And The Midianites (Judges 7:1-8:21)

Chapter seven begins with the preparation of Gideon’s army for battle with the Midianites. God speaks to Gideon and tells him his army is too large and the numbers must be reduced. The reason for this is that God does not want Israel to “claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘my own hand has saved me’” (Judges 7:2). The men are told that if any are afraid they can return home. Twenty-two thousand men return, leaving ten thousand soldiers. The numbers are furthered reduced to three hundred following a test of how the men drank water. God tells Gideon if he is afraid he can go down to the Midianite camp and he will be strengthened by what the Midianites say. That night Gideon goes to the camp and hears a man tell a dream to his friend. The friend interpreted the dream as meaning the Midianites had been given into the hands of God and Gideon. Gideon is reassured by the dream and returns to his army and tells them the Midianites have been delivered into their hands. Gideon divides his army into three companies of one hundred men each. Each man is given a trumpet, a torch, and a pitcher to hide the torch. They attack during the night by breaking the pitchers, blowing the trumpets, and everyone yelling “The sword of the LORD and of Gideon” (Judges 7:20). The Midianites were afraid and confused and God “set every man’s sword against his companion throughout the whole camp ...” (Judges 7:22). The Midianite army flees and Gideon sends messengers throughout Ephraim encouraging others to join in the battle.

Chapter eight describes some cooperation problems with various Israelites. Some of the Ephraimites are upset that they were not initially asked to join in the battle. Gideon appeases them by stating they were able to kill two Midianite princes – something Gideon was unable to do. Gideon asks for food from the people of Succoth and Penuel but is refused. After capturing the two Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, Gideon punishes the men of Succoth and kills the men of Penuel. Then, Gideon executes the two Midianite kings.

Gideon And The Ephod (Judges 8:22-35)

Following this great victory the people want Gideon, his son, and his grandson to rule over them. Gideon refuses by saying, “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you” (Judges 8:23). Gideon though, does take the earrings and other jewelry from the plunder and makes an ephod and sets it up in the city of Ophrah. The Bible states concerning the ephod that “all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and his house” (Judges 8:27). There were forty years of peace following Gideon’s victory. Gideon fathers seventy children by his wives

and concubine and dies “at a good old age” (Judges 8:32). Following Gideon’s death the “children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals” (Judges 8:33).

Lessons

There are many lessons which can be learned from the life of Gideon.

First, Gideon teaches the importance of humility in serving God. When the Lord told Gideon that he would be the one to save Israel from the Midianites, Gideon’s response was “O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (Judges 6:15). Also, when the Israelites wanted to make Gideon king his response was “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you” (Judges 8:23). God has always desired humility from His people. “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Proverbs 29:23). “Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble” (Proverbs 3:34).

Second, one learns about faith from Gideon. He is listed in Hebrews 11:32, along with Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, for his faith. Gideon’s faith was based on evidence. When someone approached him claiming to be the Angel of the Lord, and that he was going to deliver Israel from Midian, he asked for a sign (Judges 6:17). Gideon asked for further confirmation with the two tests of the fleece (Judges 6:36-40). Even though one may argue that his faith should have been established at this point, Gideon still believed the evidence once it was presented. True faith is based on evidence (Hebrews 11:1).

In the realm of Christianity one should only believe that which the evidence supports (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1). Also, Gideon’s faith, which was based on evidence, led him to lead a small army against much greater numbers. Christians need reminded that true faith is not just mental assent but is always shown by action (James 2:14-26). One can only wonder how much good could be accomplished by God’s people today if they possessed the faith of Gideon.

Third, one learns that when God is on one’s side, numbers do not matter. Even though Gideon and his men were able to confuse the enemy and have their army appear larger than it was, it was God who gave the victory (Judges 7:9).

A Christian’s first concern should not be “what does the majority believe?” but should be “what does God say on this matter?” The sad reality is that the majority is usually wrong. “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Fourth, one learns that God's servants are far from perfect. After Gideon is triumphant against the Midianites, he makes an idol which is worshiped by the people (Judges 9:24-27). The Bible states in Judges 8:27 that "all Israel played the harlot with it." Even though Gideon was a man who accomplished great things and stood out in a time of faithlessness, he still reflected the idolatry of his nation.

One is reminded of other Bible characters whose flaws are revealed. Jonah fled from God and then went to a pagan nation preaching a message of destruction. Abraham, father of the faithful, twice lied concerning his relationship with Sarah. David, a man after God's heart, was guilty of various sins which the Bible records.

What Christians need to remember is that they will also sin and fail in their service to God. What is important is that they always turn from that sin and desire to grow closer to God.

Gideon was a man of faith in a time when faith in God was hard to find. Modern readers of Judges need to emulate the good qualities he possessed and learn from the areas in which he failed.

DEBORAH: A MOTHER IN ISRAEL

Janie Gallagher

Judges 4, 5

We read about Deborah in the fourth and fifth chapters of the book of Judges. Deborah is described as a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, and as a judge of Israel in Judges 4:4. Before learning more about this great woman of the Bible, it is important to understand a little of the background of the time in which Deborah lived.

The book of Judges covers the period of time in which judges “ruled” the Israelites. One writer made the point that “the aim of the book is not to give a continuous history of the period between Joshua and Samuel, but to illustrate in particular striking deliverances the divine principle of dealing with Israel, which is laid down in Ch. ii. 16-19.” (Fausset, 1999 p. 3). These verses inform us of the cycle of behavior in which the Israelites turned from God. God punished them through their neighboring nations; the Israelites cried out to God for help; then God raised up a judge to deliver them from their oppressors. The Israelites would then, once again, disobey God after the death of the judge. This cycle is seen throughout the book of Judges.

The judges of this time were men and one woman who were providentially chosen by God to not only administer justice within Israel, but to also free the Israelites from those who oppressed them. The judges were chosen from different areas of Canaan at different times to deliver the tribes who were being oppressed at that time. Not all twelve tribes were under persecution at the same time. In Deborah’s case, she was chosen to liberate Northern Israel.

We find Deborah executing judgment under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in the land of Ephraim during the oppression of Jabin, king of Canaan. Jabin, which was actually a family name of the kings of Canaan similar to the Pharaohs of Egypt, had been oppressing the Israelites from the northern tribes for twenty years. God’s people began to cry out to the Lord to deliver them from Sisera who was described as a captain who commanded nine hundred chariots of iron. Deborah listened to her people and sent for a man named Barak, the son of Abinoam, telling him that God had commanded that they take ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun toward Mount Tabor in order to engage Sisera and his army in a battle in which God had promised that the Israelites would be victorious (4:2-7). It is obvious that, in asking Barak to lead the army, Deborah did not feel that military leadership was a task for her to undertake.

Barak agreed to go to battle only if Deborah would go with him. She agreed but told Barak that the glory would not go to him, but that the Lord would deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman. Barak may have thought Deborah meant herself, but, as we will see later, the Lord was referring to another woman.

The battle, which began with Deborah saying, “Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee? ... (4:14)”, most likely occurred near the Kishon River since Judges 5:20-21 refers to a storm which caused flooding of the Kishon River. This area would have been an open plain which should have been beneficial to the army of Sisera, but, because of the storm caused by the Lord, the Bible describes the scene as one of chaos. Verses 20-22 of chapter 5 describe a scene where “the horses pulling the chariots, broke ranks as the chariots became stalled in the mud, and, with wild prancing, galloped away from the helpless drivers.” (Wood, 1981) The Bible says that the Lord “discomfited Sisera and all his chariots and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot and fled away on his feet.” (4:15)

The battle was won, leaving none from the Canaanite army alive except for Sisera, who fled to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber. Judges 4:17 tells us the reason Sisera went to these people for help. “...for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and house of Heber the Kenite.” Sisera assumed he had a friend in Heber and his wife Jael. How wrong he was! Jael quickly deceived Sisera into resting in her tent and then, while he was sleeping, drove a tent peg through his head, killing him. Undoubtedly, Jael is the woman to whom Deborah referred when informing Barak that Sisera would be delivered into the hands of a woman. We can see God’s providence at work in all these situations. Victory was attained for the northern tribes of Israel, and peace reigned for the next forty years.

Though not much is explicitly said about Deborah, one can infer many character traits Deborah must have possessed in order to be the woman described in Judges 4 and 5. First of all, one sees a righteous woman when reading about Deborah. God chose Deborah, a woman, to lead the Israelites during a time when it was quite unusual for a woman to be in a position of authority. God, along with her fellow Israelites, must have had tremendous confidence in her. He trusted her above the men in that area to have the wisdom to deal with the problems facing the Israelites at this time. One is reminded of the confidence God put in Mary, the mother of Jesus. In Luke 1:28 the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she is “highly favoured” of the Lord. Deborah, too, would have been a woman “highly favored” of the Lord to be given the responsibilities she was given. The very fact that the people of Israel were willing to listen to her counsel is a testimony to her goodness and the respect she commanded.

Deborah also shows an attitude of humility through her actions recorded in Judges. When appealed to by the people of Northern Israel to do something about their situation, Deborah called for Barak to lead the army. She did not mind turning over control of the situation to another, because her motivation was not one of personal gain or glory. This attitude may have been one of the reasons God chose her as a judge of Israel. We know through other passages in the Bible that humility is considered to be a noteworthy trait. Proverbs 22:4 tells us that, “By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life.” 1 Peter 5:5-6 says, “... and be clothed with humility for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” Deborah seemed to understand that being recognized by the Lord was enough. She did not need or desire the praise of men.

One also sees a love for God and her fellow man in the life of Deborah. Her willingness to accept the challenges that God set before her is a testimony to her love and trust in God. Not many women would have had the confidence to take on a task as awesome as judging the chosen people of God, but Deborah did—not because she necessarily felt she was so aptly qualified, but because she loved God enough to trust him and do as he willed. Unlike Moses, there is no record of Deborah's arguing with God about the position he had chosen for her. She might have, like Moses, said, “*Who am I (Exodus 3:11)* to be chosen as a judge of Israel? Or she might have used Moses' excuse that, “*They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice (Exodus 4:1)*. After all, I am just a woman.” She might have also used Moses' last excuse of, “*I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue (Exodus 4:10)*. The Bible does not record any reluctance on Deborah's part to do what God asked her to do.

Her love for her fellowman is shown in her willingness to take on the overwhelming task given to her. Judging Israel at this time must have been time consuming and difficult. The people were unhappy. Things were not going well for her people economically or spiritually. Dealing with those difficulties would have been demanding on her physically and emotionally, but she was asked to undertake an even greater task—going to battle with an army led by an extremely successful captain who employed nine hundred iron chariots! Still she did not falter, showing her great love for her people.

This willingness to go to battle with an army that by man's standards would almost certainly defeat them, exhibits another exemplary trait of Deborah—that of complete faith in God. Deborah did not hesitate when told by God to take an army to battle Sisera. She sent for Barak and convincingly persuaded him to lead the army. From the account in Judges 4, one sees a distinct difference in the faith exhibited by Deborah and Barak. Deborah stated with absolute certainty that the Lord would deliver Sisera and his army into their hands. Barak, in contrast, would not agree to go into battle unless

Deborah went with him. Barak's lack of faith seems to be exemplary of the lack of faith of the entire Israelite nation at that time. Lack of faith is most probably the reason the Israelites had not driven out the inhabitants of the land of Canaan as commanded by God. Judges 1:19 tells us that they, "could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." God had no problem helping Barak defeat Sisera with his nine hundred chariots of iron, so it is absurd to think that Judah could not have defeated the army they faced soon after entering the promised land. Judah simply lacked faith that with God they could defeat any army—even one with chariots of iron. Sadly, had the Israelites done as God had commanded them, the periods of oppression by the Canaanites would never have happened.

The last trait of Deborah to be discussed is one of thankfulness. God tells us, in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God ..." Deborah was jubilant after the defeat of Sisera and King Jabin, and she did not forget from whom this wonderful victory came. Judges 5 is an account of the song of thanksgiving and praise given to God for the defeat of the Canaanites. Deborah expressed her thanksgiving and praise to God in Judges 5:2-3, "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel." Deborah knew who had precipitated their victory and who deserved the glory. She nor Barak tried to take the glory for this wonderful victory. Their thanksgiving and praise went out to God in a beautiful song which described the battle fought.

We do not know how Deborah's life ended, but we do know that for forty years after this battle peace reigned for Northern Israel. Considering the faith Deborah exhibited during this difficult time in Israel's history, one can assume that she continued that faith throughout her life, and she will forever be remembered as the woman who "arose a mother in Israel."

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JOSEPH

Terry G. Jones

INTRODUCTION:

1. Without doubt, one of the great Old Testament characters is Joseph, the eleventh son of Jacob.
 - A. With the exception of Abraham, the narrative of Joseph occupies more space than any other personal story in the Old Testament.
 - B. Since God never uses space in the Bible unwisely or without purpose, there evidently must be valuable lessons in the life of Joseph that would merit our examination.
 - C. John Butler suggests the following three reasons why so much is written in the Bible about Joseph:
 - 1) Explanation Of Circumstances.
 - a. Without this record of Joseph we would be greatly puzzled about the circumstances described in the Book of Exodus. We would not know why Israel was so firmly entrenched in Egypt, how they got there, and why they stayed so long.
 - b. We would not know what Exodus meant when it says the persecution of Israel began when a king arose who knew not Joseph (Ex. 1:8).
 - 2) Example Of Conduct.
 - a. His life is nearly impeccable, and, as a result, gives valuable instruction and encouragement in the matter of God-honoring behavior. Joseph had such a varied life yet in every situation he shows us how to live uprightly and faithfully for God.
 - b. This great patriarch of character stands nearly alone in Scripture in his excellent conduct, for few men in the Scripture give such a great example of godly living as Joseph does.

- 3) Exhibit Of Christ.
 - a. Joseph is in many ways an excellent type of Christ, and this alone merits much being written about his life.
 - b. Christ is the main theme of the Scriptures, and Joseph's story certainly emphasizes this blessed and illuminating truth.
[John G. Butler, *Joseph, The Patriarch of Character*, (Clinton, IO: LBC Publications, 2002), pp. 10-11].
2. The life of Joseph presents many outstanding qualities that are worthy of our study and emulation. Let us notice but a few of them.

DISCUSSION: **JOSEPH . . .**

I. REMEMBERED GOD IN YOUTH.

- A. Obeyed Jacob.
 1. Joseph respected and obeyed his parents (Gen. 37:2).
 2. God commands children to obey their parents (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3).
- B. Obeyed Jehovah.
 1. Joseph was only seventeen years old when his brothers sold him into slavery. Although in a foreign land, Joseph never forgot God or turned from him (Gen. 37:2ff.).
 2. Eccl. 12:1

II. REMAINED FAITHFUL IN HARDSHIP.

- A. Conspiracy of His Brothers (Gen. 37:18ff.).
 1. Joseph was hated by his brothers (Gen. 37:3-5).
 2. Although they conspired against him to sell him into slavery and lead Jacob to believe that he was dead, Joseph showed no evidence of sinning against his brothers or against God.

B. Confinement In Prison (Gen. 39:20).

1. Joseph was falsely accused of wrongdoing and unjustly confined to prison where he spent two years (Gen. 41:1).
2. Even while in prison he remained faithful and “the Lord was with him” (Gen. 39:23).
3. While interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh, Joseph glorified God (Gen. 41:16).

III. RESISTED TEMPTATION.

A. Honored Marriage.

1. When tempted by Potiphar’s wife, Joseph recognized that she belonged to her husband and he refused to violate that union (Mt. 19:6).
2. God’s law is clear regarding marriage (Ex. 20:14, 17; Rom. 7:2-3; Eph. 5:22-25).
3. Joseph could have reasoned that he was in a foreign land and nobody would ever know. However, Joseph realized that God would know, and so he refused (Gen. 39:7-9).
4. Joseph resisted temptation by fleeing (Gen. 39:13; 2 Tim. 2:22).

B. Hard Work.

1. Slaves and prisoners normally become bitter and resentful. Yet, Joseph excelled because of his diligent work in Potiphar’s house and was rewarded for it (Gen. 39:3-4).
2. Even when cast into prison, he resisted the temptation to give up and demonstrated a diligent work ethic (Gen. 39:21-23).
3. Eph. 4:28

C. Honesty.

1. That Joseph was impeccably honest is very evident.

- a. Potiphar put him in charge of his entire house (Gen. 39:4, 8-9).
 - b. Pharaoh put him in charge of all of Egypt (Gen. 41:39-44).
2. God's people are characterized by honesty (Lk. 8:15; Acts 6:3; Phil. 4:8).

IV. REPAID GOOD FOR EVIL (Gen. 50:15-21).

- A. Joseph was not the kind of man to harbor resentment and hold a grudge.
- B. Although he was eventually in a position to get even with those who mistreated him, Joseph demonstrated what a great man that he was by doing good to them (Mt. 7:12).

CONCLUSION:

1. Without doubt, Joseph was a spiritual giant who demonstrated great faith in God.
2. Whether in the pit or in the palace he exemplified strong moral character.
3. Of all the outstanding details of his life, we have noticed that Joseph . . .
 - A. Remembered God In Youth.
 - B. Remained Faithful In Hardship.
 - C. Resisted Temptation.
 - D. Repaid Good For Evil.
4. May God help us to emulate these good qualities in our own life.

DANIEL, SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABED-NEGO

Dan Kessinger

As surely as God calls the world to repentance, he calls the penitent to faithfulness. If one were to ask any number of Christians to identify the defining issues of Christianity, faithfulness would certainly be cited. Faithfulness is a matter of such enduring and emphatic importance that it would be conspicuous by its absence from the issues that define Christianity.

That faithfulness is a critical issue is more than just a vague impression. The God of Heaven has exerted much effort and disseminated much information in his quest for faithfulness among his people. But we are weak and prone to failures. Though the God of Heaven is a kind God full of grace and mercy, his call to faithfulness is absolute.

In order to bolster his people's faith, God identifies and heralds those who practiced faithfulness. Whether these great Bible characters were otherwise obscure or whether they were men and women of great renown, they all practiced faithfulness. Can they be of help to us? They can, but only if we permit them to help. We have allowed these great people to become two dimensional; we are then trapped in a lonely world bereft of our partners of faith in other centuries. God gave us their stories in his wisdom; they are more than just images cut from Bible schoolbooks.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares {us}, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (Heb. 12:1)

The stories of God's people are the lore of Christianity.¹ Such family stories bind folks together by a common experience, and every family has them. They are re-told at family gatherings, and they never grow old, though each family member knows every part of every story. They are OUR stories. We might tell our funny family anecdotes to others, but the humor may never be fully appreciated. And the emotional impact of tender family stories cannot be fully felt by others. We are blessed by the re-telling and re-hearing of the stories of our brethren among our brethren. We find joy, peace, faith, and strength by the knowledge of the greatness of our spiritual family.

If Hebrews 12:1 is a stunning affirmation of the fact that we are not alone in our pilgrimage, Rom. 4:11 reminds us that we are a family.

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which {he had while still} un-circumcised, that he might be the father

of all those who believe, though they are un-circumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,

Abraham is here called our spiritual forebear, and he has no equal in our earthly genealogy. We gather in these lectures to drink in the greatness of our family: to thrill in their adventures, to celebrate their triumphs, to avoid their errors, to know our heavenly father through the lives of our elder brothers and sisters.

Consider the story of four of our brothers, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. The book of Daniel is the source of our story. And though that great book is full of prophetic mystery, we shall forego a discussion of the deeper of Daniel's revelations. This is the grand saga of four Hebrew men who lived through a tumultuous time. They were once four ordinary young men like thousands of others until one day changed their lives forever.

Destruction

When we first heard of these four, they were but teenagers, and their names were Hebrew names. Daniel was not yet called Belteshazzar, Shadrach was known as Hananiah, Meshach was born Mishael, and Abed-Nego was Azariah. These were all good Hebrew names, and there is no reason to assume they were anything other than good Hebrew boys. But a series of events with world-wide implications had changed their lives forever.

The four lived in a morally conflicted land. Judah had a great cleansing reformation under the leadership of King Hezekiah, but that had been one hundred twenty years and several evil kings ago. The great King Josiah had also expunged evil from his land, but not from the hearts of a people steeped in evil. After the reign of Manasseh, it seemed that Judah was doomed in spite of any reforms. Josiah could only be blessed himself in living to see the degradation and ruination of his beloved Judah (2 Ki. 22:20).

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were of the royal family, or at least of the nobility. Thus it is reasonable to conclude that they knew both the history of the destruction around them and an awareness of the dangers posed by Babylon's power. Beginning in 606 BC, only three years after Josiah died, the Babylonian threat blossomed into warfare. Judah was just as naked militarily as she was morally; she stood no chance against the Babylonian steamroller.

On a much smaller scale, the lives of four young men were turned upside down. Their national security was proved to be a fraud, their proud leaders were killed and humiliated, and they themselves were captured to serve the king of Babylon. Ironically, they were deported because they were privileged young men. At this early date, Nebuchadnezzar only deported the nobility,

leaving the craftsman class and the poorest of the people. The king's order is recorded in Dan. 1:3 "Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles,"

There is little doubt that this captivity was more horrible than a casual reading of Daniel would indicate. The four young men were taken from their homes, their families, and their nation, never to return. They were also almost certainly castrated. The Babylonians did this that they might prove less troublesome and could be trusted with harem duties.²

Though the discussion is awkward, one ought to contemplate how devastating an event this was to these young men. The understandable trauma and shame associated with such a mutilation was further complicated by Jewish custom. That these four boys now would have to abandon the hope of joy in wives and family is obvious. For a Jewish man dying with no descendants was not only unfortunate but also shameful. Also, these four young men would be forbidden by law from ever fully participating in the congregation of God's people (Deut. 23:1). It was a de-humanizing experience.

No Defilement

These four young men, really little more than boys, had suffered the loss of home and family, sexual identity, and religious standing. They had been ostracized from their former lives as thoroughly as any four young men could have been. Given these facts, one could sympathize with a decision to jettison the distinctive holiness which was the birthright of the Hebrews. But like another young man far from physical and spiritual brethren, these young men had a faith that withstood distance, foreign opposition, and bitterness (Gen. 39:9).

Even in these terrible circumstances, God was with them. "Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and good will of the chief of the eunuchs." (Dan. 1:9) Given all that had befallen them it must have been most difficult to imagine a purpose in their lives. It would have been far easier to fall into the despair of victim-hood. They could have chosen to lament their broken lives and dead dreams. Little did they realize that God had a reason for preserving them through the Babylonian onslaught. Neither could they imagine that their iron banded faith would bless those of us, their spiritual brethren, when we face our own Babylon.

The boys were now in training for service to their foreign king, and, as prisoners of war, they had little choice. Interestingly, they also had God's word on the matter, for the prophet Jeremiah was preaching that resistance was futile (Jer. 38:17-23). There were other issues over which they had no control. They now all wore Babylonian names, though Daniel calls himself by his

Hebrew name throughout his life, presumably because he himself is writing. They probably wore Babylonian clothing and had to adapt themselves to many foreign ways.

God's people frequently confuse matters of culture with matters of faith. There is also a tendency to confuse those things beyond our control with those things that are merely inconvenient. God understands how certain choices are removed from us and does not hold us accountable for them. "For if there is first a willing mind, {it is} accepted according to what one has, {and} not according to what he does not have." (2 Cor. 8:12). But failures in matters beyond our control do not excuse failing in those things that we do control.

While the young men were in many ways Babylonians, they sought the opportunity to be holy in their diet.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. (Dan. 1:8)

The Hebrew dietary requirements must surely have seemed foolishness to the Babylonians. To their way of thinking, these four Hebrews were not only refusing fine meals, they were holding to the religious tradition of a conquered God. In the pagan world, national conquest proved the superiority of one's god. Why honor the commands of a conquered Jewish god?

Presumably, these well-educated and godly men understood why Judah had been devastated; it was not due to God's failures, but according to his explicit command; it came because of his conditional promises and warnings. The character and power of Jehovah had not been impugned, and, in spite of extreme circumstances, God's law still prevailed.

The "king's delicacies" were rich and expensive food, thought to be the very best nutrition. But one could also find simple foods in a city like Babylon, foods that met the requirements of God's law. Presumably, these vegetables would have been the staple of commoners. Daniel proposed to test whether they would prosper physically on this diet, compared to the other young men who ate the king's delicacies. Evidently, the king was only concerned with the results, and would not interfere with diet so long as the young men did not appear to suffer physically.

Whether due to God's direct intervention, or a testament to God's wisdom in his dietary restrictions, the results were astounding. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego not only survived, but they also prospered beyond the other young men. Thus they were permitted to eat the things which did not defile.

Today, the brethren of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego have full assurance that God is mindful of them as well. Even in the direst of circumstances, God is there. He has promised; he will fulfill. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Pet. 5:7) And God's care is more than well-wishing. He arranges events and people in order to bless his children. He has done so to our elder brothers; he will do so for us. He is a faithful God.

We can also know that God's law is right and that he expects us to keep it to the best of our ability. Our four brothers were saved by grace, just as all men have always been, but it was incumbent upon them to live faithfully even when circumstances tempted them to do otherwise. They were not perfect men, but they were faithful men.

That they might seek mercies of the God of Heaven

Daniel and his friends were still quite young when they faced their next great challenge from King Nebuchadnezzar. He had dreamed a troublesome dream and sought an interpretation. Rather than blaming such dreams on vagaries of the mind or late meals, the ancients tended to count dreams as messages from Divinity. This idea had some validity. Not only did God's prophets dream dreams, but also others received God's communications by dream (Gen. 31:24; Gen. 41:1-8; Judges 7:13-14).

Babylon in Chaldea was a place so full of magicians that "Chaldean" also came to mean "sorcerer." There was no shortage of "wise men" to consult about a dream, and the king called upon them to interpret his vision.

But the king, being a cunning man, wanted assurance that the interpretation of his vision was true. Though some believe he really had forgotten he dream as he claimed ("the thing is gone from me" -[Dan. 2:5]), it seems more likely that he was testing the would-be interpreter. His Chaldeans must first reveal to him the dream and then explain its meaning. After all, anyone can attach a meaning to a dream, but Nebuchadnezzar wanted the truth. It's possible he had forgotten his dream, but, if he had forgotten it, would he know the real dream from a figment of an interpreter's imagination?

The "wise men" of Babylon were proved frauds and were ordered killed. The four Hebrews, evidently considered "wise man" as well, were also condemned. When Daniel was informed of the order, he asked for a stay of execution. Then, he, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego used that time in prayer. Their prayer specified a request for the answer to the king's dream. And God responded to their prayer, revealing the meaning to Daniel. It is also interesting that Daniel took time to pray a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God for their answered prayer (Dan. 2:20-23).

Daniel stood before the greatest king of all the earth with the answers he desperately sought, but, before he gave him those answers, Daniel preached to him. Though Daniel was respectful of the king's authority, he himself served the King of kings. The answers came neither from his own power, or a god, but from the God. Such a declaration was an indictment of the gods Nebuchadnezzar served, and was thus boldly stated.

"But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for {our} sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart. (Dan. 2:30)

Daniel was only God's instrument of revelation. The hidden message had been made manifest because four godly men had asked God for help. In these hard times, they still believed in God and in praying to him. They prayed for answers that had been hidden to the wisest men of the earth. They believed in the power of prayer.

The incident forcibly demonstrates how God works in believers' lives. They might do all that is in their power to do, and they may do those things faithfully, but, without God's blessing, their efforts are doomed. *"Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain."* (Psa. 127:1) In the final analysis, the honor and glory belongs to the God of heaven. While president, Jimmy Carter once remarked "We ought to work as if everything depends on us, and pray as if everything depends on God."

God saw to it that the four Hebrews were blessed. Not only was the king moved to praise the God of Heaven (Dan. 2:47), but he also blessed Daniel. He was singled out to head the province of Babylon and to be administrator over the Wise Men.

Here is an outstanding token of how the providence of God had prevailed. How else could a castrated Israelite-and one who was not allowed to enter into the assembly of Jehovah in Jerusalem-have been made ruler of the province of Babylon and the governor over the wise men of Babylon? Daniel had been chosen to lead his people out of the furnace of affliction while protecting the court against divinations, sorcery, and astrology.³

Daniel remembered his friends. They had stood together; they had suffered together; they had prayed together. At Daniel's request, the king also set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in high positions in the province.

But if not ...

In the commencement address to Thiel College in 1992, George Will wrote the following.

In June 1940, a British officer in the desperate circumstances of Dunkirk beach flashed to London a three-word message: "But if not." What meaning, if any, would we find in such a – to us – opaque message?

"But if not." Far from seeming opaque in 1940, it was instantly recognized, as its sender assumed it would be, as a Biblical quotation. It is from the Book of Daniel, from the passage in which Nebuchadnezzar commands Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego to either worship the golden image or be thrust into the fiery furnace. The three threatened men respond defiantly: "... our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image ..."

This is, at least to me, an astonishing and deeply stirring episode. Here we have an officer, with his back to the English Channel and his face to the Wehrmacht. In this extreme situation, he expresses his heroic defiance with breathtaking elegance and economy. I especially stress, and envy, the economy. He distilled his situation and moral stance into three words - three syllables, actually. In the cacophony of war, in the deadly confusion of an evacuation under attack, he deftly plucked from the then-common culture - mind you, this was just 62 years ago - an almost universally familiar fragment of a passage from a book. With the fragment he connected himself, and his interlocutors, with a resonant story from the Western canon.⁴

Such defiance of overwhelming evil is the stuff of the truest heroism. Our literary anecdotes frequently encourage us not to give up. Such stories teach that victory can be snatched from defeat by perseverance. It's good advice for a locker room wall or bulletin board. But in the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, the principle of "victory through perseverance" falls short of the power and grandeur of their faith.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were the victims of a conspiracy by the very Chaldeans (or "Wise Men") whose lives they had helped preserve in Chapter 2. Their rancor may have been based on racial prejudice as well as professional jealousy.

In any case, the opportunity for accusation was found in a gargantuan idol erected by Nebuchadnezzar. Perhaps foolishly puffed up at being the "head of gold," the king demanded that all would bow and worship his new idol.

The times for such worship would be announced by the playing of instruments, and any offenders would be burned to death in a furnace.

Predictably, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego did not bow to the idol. Where was Daniel? The answer is not clear. Until now their stories have been intertwined. Perhaps Daniel's higher ranking in the kingdom had insulated him from the Chaldean conspiracy.

The three Hebrews were brought before an enraged King Nebuchadnezzar. He was probably a most surprised monarch to find such open disobedience of a simple order, especially considering his draconian threat against offenders. Perhaps because of their high position in government, the three young men were given the opportunity to avoid the prescribed punishment. If upon hearing the next fanfare they worshiped the idol, they would be spared. If not, it was the fiery furnace.

This is the time, the moment of truth, the day of decision. Our brothers had no specific promise of deliverance, they assumed that they might pay for their faith with their lives. On the other hand, the king's command was immediate, and the consequences were visible. He himself played this theme as he asked "...And who {is} the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (Dan. 3:15) Their commitment was most impractical; it was to be honored no matter what.

We've all heard the analogies from athletics; it's true that those who refuse to give up are often rewarded with victory. But this phrase "But if not," might be the ultimate expression of the God given human spirit. It is one who refuses to give up even if he must fail miserably in the process. It is refusing to quit the race only to finish last. It is a boxer staggering to his feet that he might absorb more punishment. It was a British army prepared to do their duty if help was not forthcoming. You can see it in the faces of every Christian martyr who confessed his faith rather than preserve his life. You can find it in damaged homes too. You can hear it as our brothers, sick with dread, defied the most powerful man on earth.

On a visit to Stone Mountain Georgia, I was impressed by a statue of a Confederate soldier. He was emaciated and was holding a broken sword aloft. The sculptor had wonderfully captured the spirit of perseverance in a lost cause. The statue represents valor, and it includes these inscriptions.

VALOR

"Men who saw night coming down about them
could somehow act as if they stood at the edge of dawn"

- A confederate soldier shortly before his death.

"So, my son,
 when in the conflict of life
 the cloud and the darkness come,
 stand unflinchingly by your post:
 Remain faithful to the discharge of your duty."
 Robert E. Lee ⁵

With Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, the cause far surpassed any Southern allegiance from the 1800's. Our brothers stood that day. Facing certain death, they stood because it was right to stand. With their hand of encouragement on our shoulders, we can drink from that wellspring of faithfulness. That faithfulness is more than a defiant attitude or even confidence. Perhaps we don't need to be great people ourselves in order to stand with them. Perhaps all we need is to better understand the nature and character of the God we serve.

As it happened, God also preserved their lives. In a blind fury, the king behaved like a man corrupted by absolute power; ordering the kiln heated seven times hotter than normal. It was a heat so intense that the soldiers charged with placing the Hebrews into the fire were themselves killed. As Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace (perhaps through a draft vent), ⁶ what he saw defied explanation. Instead of the expected three dying men, he saw four. In a furnace so overheated that those nearest its open door were killed, they were unbound and unharmed.

Who was this mysterious fourth figure? Can we trust the description of a pagan king who presumably knew nothing of the Messiah, yet said "... the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (Dan. 3:25) It might have been Jehovah himself in human form. The king could have mistaken an angel for a god. Lacking any contrary evidence, it would seem best to allow his words to stand as he uttered them. Jesus came to assist Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

Was a literal divine presence needed in order to deliver? Could not God have protected his servants from afar, in a more impersonal way? He chose to personally intervene. Whether this were a Theophany, a Christophany, or the appearance of an angel, God had a purpose in this visible display.

To Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, the presence of the Lord must have been a comfort and assurance. Just as they had believed, God was concerned about their problems; he was watching over them and caring for them. What did the Lord say to them? Perhaps his message was a simple "You have done well," or "I am proud of you boys." Perhaps a squeeze of the shoulder said all that was needed.

Our brothers emerged from a fire unhurt, with hair and clothing un-singed; they did not even smell of smoke. A thoroughly impressed Nebuchadnezzar decreed (on pain of death, etc.) that no one should speak against Jehovah.

Were our brethren afraid? Only if they were madmen were they not. After all, a fiery furnace is still a fiery furnace. But it was there that they met our Lord. Their voices call out to us from beyond whatever king or fire disputes our faith in God. It is not a blind leap we are called to make, but one of trust. Unhurt, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego call "It's all right." Jesus is here and he will catch you. "... lo, I am with you always, {even} to the end of the age.' Amen." (Mt. 28:20)

As he did aforesaid ...

The character Daniel occupies a unique place in our imaginations. Perhaps because of the narrative sections, it is hard to picture him as an aged man. But, as all of us do, Daniel grew old. Daniel lived and prospered through the glory days of the Babylonians, reprising his role as a king's interpreter on the eve of the Persian conquest. Estimates place him as old as 78 when he appeared before Belshazzar.⁷ He was at least 84 when he faced the lions.⁸

In our hearts' journey to the side of Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego, and Daniel, we tend to picture them in the prime of life. Of course, this isn't true. Since only Daniel is mentioned in the latter events, one can safely assume that he, alone, is left alive of his friends. Such is the lot of those who live to an advanced age.

Perhaps there is some validity to the mental image of an evergreen Daniel. After all, age is partly an attitude. The four boys had been mature beyond their years when they were young, and service to God can bring youthful joy to the late Autumn of life. In truth, Daniel was the same man he had been all those many years before. Life had changed around him; time had removed his friends from him; kings and kingdoms had come and gone. Inside a body stooped with age and a whitened head, Daniel was the same man he had always been.

The fall of Babylon and the handwriting on the wall are great events. But even though chapter five records Daniel's interpretation of "Mene, Mene Tekel, Upharsin" and his bold accusation against Belshazzar, the emphasis is not on Daniel himself. A later event better emphasizes the character of the aged Daniel: the lion's den.

Just as it had happened to his friends so many years before (and under a different empire), Daniel was conspired against. In an astounding turn of events, this foreign national found himself promoted to governor (one of three)

in a second empire, but some of the other officials were jealous, and they sought a charge against him (Dan. 6:4).

The attempts to find fault with Daniel proved to be a double edged tribute to his character. First, Daniel was subjected to detailed examinations of his work in the kingdom, but there was no error to find. This in itself was an astounding feat of character. There is a great difference between a general audit and one whose purpose it is to find fault in the smallest detail. The examiners were not interested in fairness, being reasonable, or overlooking minor infractions, but there was nothing to find.

The conspirators gave a second tribute to Daniel's character when they said, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find {it} against him concerning the law of his God." (Dan. 6:5). Daniel and his faith had always been inseparable. His was not a religion to be seen of men; Daniel's faith was a real part of his life. It permeated each decision he made; it had an impact on those who knew him. And Daniel's enemies believed he would violate a king's order rather than his faith. They were right.

The conspirators succeeded in duping King Darius into a short-lived moratorium on petitions to any man or god, other than the king himself (Dan. 6:7). It may have been that Darius was misled by his own pride. But if so, the text suggests no condemnation of him; his regret also argues against Darius falling prey to a fit of vanity. Perhaps Homer Hailey's assessment is correct, though I disagree with his identification of Darius.

As a newly appointed king over the province, and with full confidence in his officials surrounding him, he saw this as an opportunity to become acquainted with the religious views and concerns of his subjects.⁹

Daniel was more than a man who prayed to God, he believed in prayer. Prayer had saved his life and the lives of his three friends when Nebuchadnezzar had demanded that a dream be told and explained. Daniel learned how to pray when he was a boy in Judah; but his prayers had taken an all-new significance when he became a captive of Babylon. Terrible things had overcome him in his life, but our Father had been taking care of our brother, watching over him and hearing him. How could he give up that precious communication?

The answer is that he could not, and he did not. Daniel continued to pray. We sometimes walk a tightrope of sorts concerning our public expression of religiosity. We must obey the principle of praying not to be seen of men (Mt. 6:5) by entering a closed room to pray alone (Mt. 6:6). But when does the private expression of faith become the sin of being ashamed of Jesus? Likewise, one might argue that open expressions of faith are exactly what Jesus was commanding in Mt. 10:32-33.

(32) Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. (33) But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

But when does the bread of confession become the leaven of the Pharisees? Maybe the answer is found in 6:10.

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

Daniel was not showing off his righteousness. Neither was he ashamed of his faith. Daniel was going to do what he did if nobody saw, or if everyone saw. The observers were simply not part of the equation. He sought privacy in prayer, but there was no shame in his faith. If ever there were a situation custom made for revealing hypocrisy, this was it. But our brother did the right thing.

The purpose of his praying is made clear by the direction of his prayers. He was not laboring under the delusion that God was back at Jerusalem, nor was he praying to that city of peace. But the people of God were there, and Daniel prayed for their welfare and for the land he would never see again.

Now, so many years after his friends had faced their trial by ordeal, Daniel finds himself in a similar situation. But he had already made his decision. And just as surely as the law of the Medes and the Persians could not be altered, neither could his faith. Do you suppose that Daniel found strength by remembering the story he himself had written, how God had helped his brothers? Now it was time to put that lesson to use in his own life. When Daniel had been a young man, he had gained strength by praying with his friends. Now they were gone, but once they had stood straight and tall in defiance of a king, even if it meant their lives. With the hands of his friends on his frail shoulders, Daniel prayed just as he had aforetime.

Darius realized he had been duped when Daniel was brought before him, and sought some loophole that might prevent an execution he did not desire. But the law Darius had signed could not be ignored. With no legal alternative, Daniel was condemned to "death by lion." But the king confidently expressed his confidence in Daniel's deliverance by Jehovah. "So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast {him} into the den of lions. {But} the king spoke, saying to Daniel, 'Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.'" (Dan. 6:16)

Darius made the statement, but we wonder, "Did he really believe it himself? Were these just kind words to a doomed man, or had Daniel's godly life demonstrated the character of a God who protects his servants?"

Perhaps it was some of each. Though Darius spent a miserable and sleepless night, there was a seed of hope that Daniel had survived. Had Darius' words of encouragement been utterly empty, he would not have arisen early and hastened to the den; he would not have bothered to say to the dead, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" (Dan. 6:20)

Meanwhile, Daniel had not been harmed. Daniel's voice answered from the pit, verifying that he was safe, and that an angel had "shut the lions' mouths" (Dan. 6:22). A joyous King Darius commanded that Daniel be released. After all, the edict had read that the offender must be placed in the den of lions; it did not dictate what the lions did with that person!

Having fulfilled the law of the Medes and Persians, King Darius was able now to give an order he believed to be just and warranted: Daniel's accusers and their families were thrown into the pit. Perhaps Daniel's astounding deliverance had given the king the political clout to summarily execute high-ranking advisors. Or perhaps this was in the king's heart to do whether or not Daniel survived. He who lives by the law of the Medes and the Persians also dies by it. (Gal. 6:7)

Like his friends before him, Daniel was no fool. Thus, he was afraid of lions. And these were not sleepy and well-fed zoo animals! "... the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den." (Dan 6:24) Judging from the manner of the conspirators' demise, the lions were deliberately kept half starved. If Daniel were to be harmed, it would happen within seconds, but the seconds turned into minutes, then hours. The natural fear that Daniel had overcome would have been replaced by thanksgiving and confidence. While Daniel may well have rested and slept, Darius tossed and turned.

Daniel gained knowledge of the divine shepherd, a truth more obvious in a lions' den than in a king's palace. Our eldest brother knew it best, and he slept as the storm raged (Mt. 8:24). Darius wanted to know it, but doubt haunted his heart and ruined his rest. The question that burned in the heart of a king that night was this: Will God take care of his children? Daniel believed it; Shadrach Meshach and Abed-Nego had lived it; Jesus knew it absolutely; and Darius got an answer too.

The Shepherd lives

In a little while, Daniel would grasp the shepherd's hand and trust his leading through a darker valley, a valley through which his friends had already journeyed. They were awaiting his arrival. Daniel's ordeal had been a blessing to his faith. He had trusted the shepherd who could overcome lions, and that shepherd could lead him home. Knowing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had been a blessing to Daniel; their faith a source of strength to him. Soon, they would be reunited; they would find the joy of being with one another as brothers in the family of God ... just as they did aforesaid.

That's why God instructed Daniel to write their story; it was for us. These are our brothers. One day you and I will also face a somber vale, but the shepherd has promised to lead us home. Do you trust him? Perhaps your faith is challenged by fear and doubt. If so, remember our four Hebrew brothers who also were afraid. Perhaps there is a nagging doubt concerning departed Christians dear to your heart. Let not your heart be troubled. Our family has a father who overcomes kings and kingdoms, lions, and fire. He'll lead us to a home filled with joy. Reunited with our brothers and sisters, it will be as it was aforesaid.

Endnotes

¹The word "lore" is used here in its true sense - that which is learned and taught, especially knowledge that becomes a tradition. The fact that these stories are thus communicated does not imply that lore, especially Bible lore, is not true. The selection of this word was deliberate, and intended to communicate a concept of a story that has a true connection with the teller and the hearer.

²Rex A Turner Sr. *Daniel, A Prophet of God* (Montgomery AL: Southern Christian University, 1993) pp 12-13.

³Ibid p 59.

⁴This transcript can be found on any number of internet sites.

⁵This description can also be found on a number of websites.

⁶Homer Hailey *A Commentary on Daniel - A Prophetic Message* (Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 2001) p.

⁷Op. Cit. Turner, p 185.

⁸Ibid p 197.

⁹Op Cit Hailey p 114.

PETER

Roger A. Rush

I am delighted to be with you today and to be a part of this lectureship. I want to express my appreciation to brother Nick Deiger, brother Albert Farley, and the elders of this good church for the opportunity to be here. And, I thank you for your presence and kind attention as we look at the life of Peter. We might refer to him as the saintly sinner. Few men in the Bible are better known than this apostle. I think we find a little of Peter in all of us.

Background

Peter's first appearance, from a chronological standpoint, is in John 1:35-42. Andrew, Peter's brother, is the first to encounter Jesus, but upon meeting Him, immediately finds Peter and tells him, "We have found the Messiah." Then he brought Peter to Jesus (John 1:41, 42). We know very little about Andrew beyond this brief incident. Peter, however, was destined to play a significant role in the beginning of Christ's church (Matthew 16:13-19).

Peter was originally called Simon (John 1:40, 41), but Jesus changed his name to "Cephas" (John 1:42), an Aramaic surname whose Greek synonym is "Petros," meaning "rock" or "stone," and, thus, the misapplication of Matthew 16:18 often occurs in which it is argued that the church was built upon Peter. The argument cannot be sustained contextually, grammatically, or historically.

Peter and his brother were in the fishing business, but Jesus called them to be "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:18, 19). Peter was a married man, but we know next to nothing about his family (Matthew 8:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5).

As already noted, he was to play a key role in the establishment of the church, for unto him the Lord gave the "the keys to the kingdom" (Matt. 16:13-19; Acts 2, 10). He was, in essence, the gatekeeper. In response to the question, "What shall we do?" Luke records: "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38). From that day to the present, the Lord has added to the church daily those being saved!

It was Peter who initiated the process which led to the selection of a successor to Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26). It was Peter and John who, in the name of Jesus, made the lame man walk, resulting in their arrest and subsequent persecution (Acts 3, 4). It was Peter who confronted Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:1-11), and it was Peter who rebuked Simon the Sorcerer for thinking he could purchase the power to

impart the Holy Spirit to others (Acts 8:9-25). It was Peter who raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-43). Peter was the one chosen to proclaim the gospel to Cornelius and his household, the first Gentile converts (Acts 10, 11). It was Peter who was miraculously released from prison while the church prayed for his safety (Acts 12:1-17). And, it was Peter who rose to defend Paul and Barnabas for their work in establishing churches among the Gentiles (Acts 15:7-21). He was also the author of two New Testament letters.

In spite of all that he accomplished, we must not lose sight of the fact that he was a man subject to weakness and sin like all men. Yet, he remained a productive servant of Christ!

Portrait of a Saintly Sinner

Peter had a faith which sometimes wavered! It was Peter, when Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water, who cried out “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (Matthew 14:28). And, when the winds became boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” (Matthew 14:30). It was also Peter, even after the resurrection and prior to the ascension, who said to the other disciples, “I am going fishing” (John 21:3). The implication was that he would return to his former livelihood. In the appearance of Jesus on shore the following morning he was challenged to examine his love and recommit to feeding the Lord’s sheep (John 21:15-17).

What about us? There may be times in our lives when doubts arise; times when we question what we believe! We must not despair. When doubts cause us to look more deeply into God’s creation and His revelation, faith will be reaffirmed. Truth stands up under careful examination!

- 1) Faith in God as Creator is the only explanation for origin supported by the evidence. No other explanation can be honestly and intellectually sustained!
- 2) Faith in the Bible as the Word of God is the only possible explanation for its accuracy, influence, and power (2 Tim. 3:16).
- 3) Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is the only defensible argument for His identity (Matt. 16:18).

Peter had a tongue which sometimes misspoke! On the transfiguration mount he declared: “It’s good to be here, let us make three tabernacles ...” (Matthew 17:4). Yet, in speaking thus he was making Moses and Elijah equal with the Lord. They were not! On the eve of our Lord’s betrayal he declared: “You will never wash my feet!” (John 13:8). Jesus responded: “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Peter then replied, “Lord, not my feet only, but

also my hands and my head” (John 13:9). Later that night he said, “Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death,” (Luke 22:33), and, then, he went on to deny Him three times!

Sadly, we often speak before we think. Christianity is the religion of the “controlled tongue.” James admonished: “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.” (James 1:26). Slander, vulgarity, profanity, lying, and gossip are all incompatible with the Christian profession, yet, like Peter, we sometimes speak before we think. That brings to mind another warning from James. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19).

Peter had a tendency to act without thinking! It was Peter who drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malcus (John 18:10, 11). There seems to be little doubt Peter was aiming to cut off more than an ear.

Again, I suspect we can all relate to Peter. We have done things without thinking, only to realize later that another course would have been better.

Peter, like all of us, sometimes lacked physical stamina! In the garden, with James and John, he found it impossible to stay awake (Matt. 26:36-46)! Jesus’ response to them was, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (vs. 41). That should be a comforting thought, especially as we age. Each of us will find ourselves constrained by the weaknesses of the flesh, as we discover the reality of growing older. But, Jesus understood the limitations of the flesh!

Peter was even a “respector of persons” (prejudiced against Gentiles)! It took a special divine intervention to convince Peter that the Gentiles were to be brought into the kingdom (Acts 10). On another occasion, Paul had to personally rebuke Peter for his prejudicial conduct (Gal. 2:11-14).

Christ broke down all the barriers between men (Gal. 3:28). James wrote: “If you show partiality, you commit sin ...” (James 2:9). It is a lesson the church still needs. We must never forget that in God’s family there are no favorites. We are all His children and must love and respect each other without regard to social, geographical, intellectual, or physical differences!

Understanding Peter’s Sins

His sins were, for the most part, sins of the moment, made in haste, without careful thought! Thus, they were not premeditated, deliberate, or willful. It is willful sin which is the most serious and ultimately makes God’s grace through Jesus ineffectual (Heb. 10:26-31).

He seemed almost always to have had the best intentions! He genuinely wanted to do what was right, sometimes following his heart when he should have been hearing Christ's word! (John 12:48). Good intentions are never a good defense for disobedience (1 Samuel 15; Rom. 10:1-3).

He was always deeply penitent (Matt. 26:75). Peter's heart was always soft. When he recognized his sin, he readily repented. Some today, no matter how obvious their sins, will cling to them tenaciously, rather than acknowledge wrong and seek forgiveness.

In spite of lapses, he was faithful to the end. Faithful does not mean flawless (1 John 1:8-10)!

Conclusion

Whether we will admit it or not, there is a little Peter in all of us. We also sin. I hope we will be like Peter when we do sin and acknowledge our wrong and seek God's forgiveness with a penitent heart, and remember that God can use us, as He used Peter, in spite of our shortcomings!

I AM THE WAY

David R. Powell

John 14:1-6

Objective: “I must needs go home by the way of the cross: there’s no other way but this ...”

Introduction:

1. Jessie Brown Pounds wrote: "I must needs go home by the way of the cross: there’s no other way but this; I shall ne’er get sight of the Gates of Light if the way of the cross I miss."
 - a. Jesus’ disciples needed to learn this lesson.
 - b. They were troubled at the thought of Jesus’ death.

2. Jesus had hinted toward the reality of His death using figures such as the temple, serpent, Jonah, and the grain of wheat.
 - a. *Temple* (Jn 2:19): “Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”
 - b. *Serpent* (Jn 3:14-15): “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”
 - c. *Jonah* (Matt 12:40): “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

- d. *Grain of Wheat* (Jn 12:24): “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain).”
3. As time passed Jesus was more direct concerning His death as viewed from John’s account.
- a. In John chapter ten we find Jesus identifying Himself as the good Shepherd saying, “I lay down My life” (Jn 10 17).
 - b. Two days after Jesus learned of Lazarus’ sickness He told the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again” (Jn 11:7); to this the disciples responded, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone you, and are You going there again” (Jn 11:8).
 - c. The disciples even attempted to prevent Jesus from going to Judea saying of Lazarus: “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well” (Jn 11:12).
 - d. Once the disciples realized that Jesus was determined to go to Judea, Thomas (called the Twin) said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go that we may die with Him” (Jn 11:16).
 - e. Following Lazarus’ resurrection and six days before the Passover (Jn 12:1), Mary (the sister of Lazarus) anointed the feet of Jesus with very costly spikenard; though Judas complained, Jesus said: “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial” (Jn 12:7).
 - f. It was during this final Judean visit, and following Jesus’ grain of

wheat analogy (Jn 12: 24) that He said: “Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour” (Jn 12:27).

- g. Now Jesus is in the upper room, having instituted the Lord’s Supper, washed the feet of His disciples, and identified Judas as His betrayer, says: “I will lay down my life for your sake” (Jn 13:37).
4. John chapter 14 begins with this blessed assurance for troubled hearts - Jn 14:1-6. [With the exception of the Shepherd’s Psalm (Ps 23), this is believed to be the second most quoted passage utilized at funerals.]
 5. From these six verses we can take comfort by viewing the admonitions, anticipations, and the affirmations of Jesus’ words.

Body:

ADMONITIONS: Two-Fold - John 14:1.

A. *Be not troubled*

1. Theme of the book of John - Jn 20:30-31.
2. Fear dwells in faithless hearts - Mark 4:35-41
3. Faith and fear, like oil and water, do not mix.
4. As to the way of the cross, the disciples must accept it on the basis of faith.

5. There are issues in life that we simply do not understand. If we are not careful, then worry (etymology of the word means to choke - worry will literally choke you from productive living) will overtake us. We must simply obey Jesus.

- a. "Let not your heart be troubled."

- b. To the troubled Jesus said, "Do not worry!" - Matt 6:25-34

[We may not see the way clear from our problems, but Jesus will provide the way -- it's a faith issue!]

B. *Believe in Me.*

1. *Being* not troubled is conditioned upon *believing* in Jesus.

2. We see this truth at the tomb of Lazarus.

- a. Jesus learned that Lazarus was sick, but delayed two days.

- b. From Bethabara to Bethany was a two-day journey.

- c. Prior to going to Bethany, Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus' death would serve the purpose of glorifying God and the Son of God (Jn 11:4).

- d. Martha, learning that Jesus was near, went out to meet Him, and Jesus shared three truths with her...

- "Your brother will rise again."
- "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."
- "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

3. Martha had difficulty accepting that God would be glorified through the death of her brother - Jn 11:38-40.

4. Learning of Jesus' death was troubling, but something was about to happen that was beyond the comprehension of the disciples; the disciple would have to accept His death on the basis of faith.

a. Through Jesus' death came glory.

b. He arose!

II. ANTICIPATIONS "If I go ... I will come again!" - John 14:2-3.

A. This text is only comforting to those who, by faith, truly believe in the promises of God--appreciation (for God's promises) comes before anticipation.

1. Notice the three promises - Jn 14:2-3.

a. "In My Father's house are many mansions."

b. "I go to prepare a place for you."

c. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

2. This causes me to reflect upon the promises made to those of

Thessalonica - 1 Thess 4:13-18.

- a. “[E]ven so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”
 - b. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”
 - c. “And the dead in Christ will rise first.”
 - d. “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”
 - e. “And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”
3. Paul, in this text to those of Thessalonica, reminded them that the hope of the resurrection was conditioned upon belief “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again... (1 Thess 4:14).
- a. Even in death there is comfort for the troubled heart. Such comfort, however, is conditioned upon faith.
 - b. Those who do not believe in Jesus have every reason in the world to be troubled by the reality of death.
- B. Jesus’ departure is assurance of His return.
1. “If I go ... I will come again!”
 2. Later, to these same men, two men in white apparel said,

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?

This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

- Ac 1:11.

C. Mansions?

Last week I visited my family in my Virginia home. It is so good to go back home. Home has a certain pleasant smell in the air. It is a place of comfort and belonging. Beside my parent's house is a small deserted log cabin. I often think of how pleasant it would be if I could live in the cabin next to my parents. God, however, has a home prepared. He doesn't promise us a cabin, but mansions. The idea of going home--what an anticipation! But how can we find the Way home? Jesus provides these three affirmations.

III. AFFIRMATIONS: “I am the Way - John 14:4-6.

A. It is a good way.

1. To the wayward Israelites, Jeremiah said: “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” - Jer 6:16.

2. To the troubled Jesus said – Matt 11:28-30.

B. It is an open way.

The way of Christ is not closed to anyone due to creed or color. In the conversion of the Ethiopian nobleman (Acts 8) we see: an open *opportunity* (“behold, a man of Ethiopia”), and open *book* (“reading

the prophet Isaiah”), an open *mind* (“how can I, except some one shall guide me”), and open *body of water* (“they came unto a certain water”), an open *confession* (“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”), an open *act of obedience* (“and he baptized him”), and an open *life of rejoicing* (“he went on his way rejoicing”).¹

C. It is a simple way (Mark 16:15-16).

Conclusion:

In a secluded valley in Switzerland a small band of patriots once marched against an invading army many times their strength. They found themselves one day at the head of a narrow pass, confronted by a solid wall of spears. They made assault after assault, but that bristling line remained unbroken. Time after time they were driven back decimated with hopeless slaughter. The forlorn hope rallied for the last time. As they charged, their leader suddenly advanced before them with outstretched arms, and every spear within reach was buried in his body. He fell dead. But he prepared a place for his followers. Through the open breach, over his dead body, they rushed to victory and won the freedom for their native land.²

¹ Hugh Fulford, “Jesus Christ: The Way, The Truth, and The Life, (*Gospel Advocate*, January 8, 1976), cover page.

² Frank L. Cox, “A Medley of Matters” (*Gospel Advocate*, October 29, 1959), cover page.

MOSES AT THE CROSSROADS

D. Gene West

Introduction

One of the most prominent and interesting characters of the Bible, who must be considered a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the man called Moses. Little children know the story of the baby whose parents refused to throw him into the Nile to drown, although it was the law that had been given by the Pharaoh who “knew not Joseph.” All recall how he was hidden by his mother until he was three months old, and when she could successfully hide him no longer, she, by the providence of God, prepared a way for his life to be sustained. She made a boat, or ark, of bulrushes and sealed it with asphalt and pitch, put the infant in the little boat and set him afloat in the reeds along the edge of the Nile River. She put Moses’ older sister Miriam in charge of guarding the baby. When the princess of all Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth, came to the river to bathe she found the baby and adopted him. Miriam suggested to the princess that she knew a Hebrew who could care for this child, and brought Moses’ own mother to care for him until he came of age. It seems he grew to maturity in the royal palaces of Egypt.

If this is not a “rags-to-riches;” “a pauper-to-prince”, an “and they lived happily ever after” story, we are not sure we have ever heard or read one. However, this is not all there is to the story of the man who, in Old Testament times, became the greatest leader of God’s people. Moses spent the first forty years of his life being reared in the royal palaces of Egypt with all the advantages of being a prince in Egypt. During this period of time he learned the arts of leadership, diplomacy, and courage necessary to make a man the kind of leader Moses would later become.

Imagine if you can, the opulence, wealth, and privilege Moses had as grandson of the Pharaoh! However, this idyllic Elysian lifestyle of wealth and privilege was not to last for Moses.

Moses Defended a Hebrew Brother

It would, indeed, be wonderful to know all the things Jochebed taught her son about his heritage and people, to say nothing of the God he would serve as no man had served him since the days of Abraham. That is a curiosity that must be satisfied at some other time and place. However, the text plainly reveals that he knew who he was, who the Egyptians were, and that the Hebrews were slaves to the Egyptian overlords. In addition to this, we note that Moses’ sympathies certainly lay on the side of the Hebrews, and that he had

compassion, affection, and pity in his heart for his people as they struggled to meet the demands of the Pharaoh.

On the occasion we are studying, Moses saw the brutal mistreatment of a nameless Hebrew brother. When he saw the Egyptian taskmaster beating the poor Hebrew, possibly to “within an inch of his life,” he decided that some action was appropriate to stop this kind of brutal treatment of his people. However, he did not strike out in blind fury, but attempted to carry out his act of mercy on behalf of the Hebrew in an anonymous fashion. The Bible says, **he looked this way and that, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand** (Exodus 2:12). Moses obviously understood that though he held, or had held, the station of prince in Egypt, he could not murder any Egyptian with impunity, not even this slave who was being abused. He also understood that if he did so and the Pharaoh learned of it, he would suffer dire consequences. Consequently, he exercised great caution to keep his defense of the anonymous Hebrew and the killing of the Egyptian secret. However, human nature being what it is, such a secret could not be kept long.

Moses then went out on a second day, and, this time, he observed two Hebrews fighting, one beating the other. Moses verbally chastised the one **who did wrong** saying, **Why are you striking your companion?** The angry Hebrew who was in the wrong replied to Moses, **Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?** (Exodus 2:13-14). Of Moses the Bible says, **So Moses feared and said, surely this thing is known.** The Hebrew word for “fear” here means, “To have an apprehension of danger; to tremble in weakness” (*Old Testament Word Studies*, Wilson, p. 159). Moses knew he was weak compared to Pharaoh, and he and Pharaoh both knew he was a Hebrew who lived, or had lived, in the royal palace as a favor to Pharaoh’s daughter. His killing of an Egyptian would not be tolerated by a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph, and who hated the Hebrews with a passion. In this very moment, Moses ...

Stood at the Crossroads of His Life

Moses was exactly right, for what he had done was known, not only by the Hebrews and perhaps people in general, but by the Pharaoh as well. When Pharaoh heard of this he sought the life of the young Hebrew prince. Moses was confronted with a great dilemma; should he stay in Egypt and plead for his life which would probably be refused, or should he flee from the anger of the great monarch? He knew the likelihood that Pharaoh would spare his life was very slim at best, because the Emperor of all the Egyptians could not allow a Hebrew, regardless of his station in life, to kill an Egyptian. Such a thing could lead to an insurrection among the slaves and bring great hardship on Egypt. On the other hand, he knew that if he left Egypt all his power, prestige and

privilege would be gone forever, to say nothing of his potential wealth. In the end, the decision probably was not as difficult as we might think.

Of Moses, the author of Hebrews said,

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (Hebrews 11:24-27 NKJV)

Moses, it is averred by some, had already made his choice so far as his loyalty was concerned, and had left the palace of Pharaoh to live among the Hebrews. The above passage lends credence to that idea since the author of Hebrews indicates that his choice to leave was a voluntary one. However, if it is the case that Moses had gone from the palace of Pharaoh and cast his lot with the Hebrews, when he killed an Egyptian, his action would have been considered treason. That would explain why Pharaoh sought to find and kill Moses.

Regardless of all the surrounding circumstances, Moses stood at the crossroads of his life and had to make choices regarding leaving Egypt. Hindsight indicates that Divine Providence led him to make the decision to leave Egypt and flee into the wilderness of Midian, that area today called southern Arabia. This decision meant he would be forced to leave his brother Aaron, his sister Miriam, and his beloved parents, if they were still living. He would never again see the woman who had adopted him, making him a royal prince in Egypt. He had no friend in Egypt to whom he could turn; no one to whom he could turn in time of need. He was going into a world unknown to him; a world in which he would have neither privilege, prestige, nor power. He had to abandon all to save his life. Like the sad story of the sale of Joseph into Egyptian bondage hundreds of years before, there was no way for Moses to see the providential hand of God working in all that was going on around him. He had come to what one author called "the Red Sea place in his life, where in spite of all he could do, there was no way out, there was no way back, there was no other way but through!"

Moses Fled to the Land of Midian

Moses had hardly arrived in the land of Midian until he again became the champion of the underdog. A priest of God whose name was Jethro, lived in Midian. He had seven daughters that seemed to act as shepherdesses. They had come to a well to draw water for their father's flock. As was customary, the male shepherds drove them away in order to water their own flocks first, making the women wait until they had finished and take only the water that

was left behind. The Bible tells us that ***Moses stood up and helped them water their flock.*** (Exodus 2:17) Moses obviously helped the women and made the shepherds who had arrived later await their turn.

When the daughters of Reuel told their father what had happened, Moses was invited into the home of Jethro, where for forty years he served as a humble keeper of sheep. Reuel gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses to be his wife, and they continued to live the simple nomadic life of shepherds until Moses learned of the death of the Pharaoh of Egypt. At this juncture the life of Moses would take another turn, but that is another story for another time.

Our Crossroads

Like Moses we all come to crossroads in our lives when we have to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, God and mammon. Sometimes these choices are not difficult to make, and sometimes they are very difficult. Probably none of us will ever be called on to make a choice similar to that of Moses, for such events seem to happen only once in history. Perhaps we will never be called on to choose between service to Christ and death as were the early saints in the 1st Century. Nonetheless, we stand at crossroads where we must make important, perhaps even life-changing choices in our service to Christ. We must remember the words of Jesus,

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

(Luke 14:26-27 NKJV)

The parallel passage from Matthew 10:37-39 speaks more forcefully as it is recorded that Jesus said,

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:37-39 NKJV)

We must always make it a conscious choice to seek first Christ and his Kingdom, fearing nothing of a worldly nature. We must follow the noble example of the great Moses of whom the Hebrews writer said,

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the

treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (Hebrews 11:24-27 NKJV)

Like Moses we must *endure as seeing Him who is invisible*. Moses made the right decision at the crossroads of his life ***by faith***; which is to say, according to the instructions of God (Romans 10:17). We, like him, must make all our decisions when we come to the crossroads of our lives by faith; according to the instructions of God. We must never forget the divinely inspired challenge God gave the Hebrews through Joshua of old when he said,

And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of 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. (Joshua 24:15 NKJV)

Conclusion

We conclude with the following by E. Louise Umlauf.

The Crossroads

Lord, I am at the crossroads! O help me choose aright,
For blinded is my vision, and darker grows the night;
Lord, help me in my weakness, I would not go astray;
One road is broad and luring, one is the "narrow way."

Lord, I am at the crossroads! It is my hour of trial;
One leads to wealth and honor, the other to self-denial;
The gods of earth are seeking to win me to their side;
But O, thou God of heaven, I would with Thee abide!

Lord, I am at the crossroads! One road is very fair,
And they that tread its mosses are decked with jewels rare;
I hear their careless laughter, their songs and revelry;
But ah! This road of pleasures leads far away from Thee.

Lord, I am at the crossroads! One road is rough and bare;
I see the crimson blood-drops of One who traveled there;
He drank the cup of sorrow that flooded o'er the brim;
But He is crowned the Victor—and I will walk with Him!

- via *Gospel Digest*, December 1958

MORDECAI

Randy Cook

Among the most intriguing and fascinating accounts of the history of God's people is the Book of Esther. Even though Queen Esther is the main character in the story, her cousin Mordecai plays an extremely important supporting role. The Book of Esther takes place in the setting of Persia, generations after Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians. The Jews in Jerusalem had been deported in three different stages, among whom were the ancestors of Mordecai and Esther. The Medes and the Persians eventually swallowed up Babylon, and the Jews enjoyed a newfound freedom. In fact, Cyrus, the first ruler of Persia, had allowed the Jews to go back to their homeland. Some chose to return to rebuild under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Yet, many others had become so accustomed to their homes in Persia that they chose to stay. Esther and Mordecai were included in the ones who chose to stay in Persia. Even though God's name does not appear anywhere in the book, His hand of providence is evident on every page.

Esther's parents had died when she was very young. Her older cousin, Mordecai, became a father to her, raised her and lovingly cared for her. A brief synopsis of the historical events of the ten chapters is as follows: In Chapter One, King Ahasuerus hosted a feast for all his officials and servants. He demanded that his wife, Queen Vashti, make an appearance before the drunken men. She refused, and that led to her being removed from the throne. Chapter Two records the search for a new queen, and we are introduced to Esther and Mordecai. Esther became Queen, not revealing the fact that she was a Jew. Mordecai, meanwhile, uncovered a plot to assassinate King Ahasuerus. In Chapter Three, we meet Haman, a wicked and powerful assistant to the king. He demanded people bow down and reverence him, which Mordecai refused to do. Haman, out of anger, convinced the King to pass a law to kill all the Jews. The decree was published throughout the empire.

In Chapter Four, Mordecai grieved in sackcloth and ashes over the plight of the Jews. Mordecai contacted Esther, and told her the most recognizable words of the Book: "Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:16). She agreed to try to convince the King for help. Chapter Five finds Esther being favorably received by the King, and she made her first request. Haman and the King were invited to a banquet hosted by Esther, but Haman had so much hatred in his heart for Mordecai that he could not enjoy it. In Chapter Six, Ahasuerus suffered from insomnia, and wanted the chronicles read to him. He heard of Mordecai's saving him from assassination, and asked what reward Mordecai had received for his heroic

efforts. The King, Ahasuerus, asked Haman what should be done to one whom the king wishes to honor. Haman made the wrong assumption, thinking he would be honored, and suggested what pageantry he would like. Much to Haman's dismay, he had to lavishly honor Mordecai, taking him through the streets of the city. In Chapter Seven, Esther's second banquet was made ready, and with Haman present, she told the king of Haman's wicked plot to kill her and her people. Haman was hanged on the gallows he had made for Mordecai. Chapter Eight reveals a counter-decree for the Jews to avenge and defend themselves. The Jews rejoiced and Mordecai was promoted. Chapter Nine records the Jews' victories over their enemies. The Jewish Feast of Purim was instituted to commemorate the victory. Finally, Chapter Ten finds Mordecai as second in command only to King Ahasuerus.

Mordecai is believed to have been a highly educated man, knowing as many as seventy languages. Some think he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews. He served as one of Ahasuerus' advisors and chief ministers, and was often present at the palace. Like other Old Testament characters (Daniel and Joseph), Esther and Mordecai were in positions of political authority in foreign governments. Yet, through it all, they remained faithful Jews.

The goal of this lesson is to look at the life of Mordecai and learn some lessons that will be beneficial for Christians today. Mordecai's concern for the orphaned, his courage to speak out against evil, his consistent reverence for God, his challenge to the younger generation, and his confident trust in God, are but a few of the lessons which can be learned as his life is studied.

Mordecai was Concerned for Orphans

Mordecai took seriously his responsibility in caring for orphans. Even though Esther was only a cousin, still Mordecai was willing to raise her as his own. He must have instilled numerous godly principles in her, because it was more than just her outward beauty that caused her attractiveness. He took a great interest in her well being, even after she became Queen.

In the New Testament, James gives instructions for godly living, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27 NKJV). As the church, and as individual Christians, we have the responsibility of caring for children who have no parents. Although most of the children in our children's homes here in America are not true orphans, we still must be compassionate and supportive of their plight. Most of the children in these homes are from homes where there has been abuse, neglect, or criminal activity. These children need our help, and, as Mordecai answered the call of caring for an orphan, we, too, must get involved.

Mordecai Had the Courage to Speak Out Against Evil

When Mordecai overheard the evil plot by two angry doorkeepers, Bigthan and Teresh, he immediately reported it to Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the King. Their angry plot was to assassinate King Ahasuerus, but the King had both hanged on a gallows. To make it even more risky for Mordecai, we must remember he was secretly a foreigner in a strange land. Mordecai saw a need that needed addressed, and courageously did what he could to help. For a while his good deed was left without reward, while evil Haman was elevated to a higher position in the kingdom.

Esther also exhibited tremendous courage later in the story when she went before the king. He had not asked to see her for a month, and to go in to the king uninvited was extremely dangerous. If he chose not to extend his scepter to her, she could be killed. She went in to him, knowing that it might cost her life, but she was willing to try for the sake of her people.

In the New Testament, the Apostles displayed similar courage in preaching the gospel. Peter and John were severely threatened and commanded not to preach in the name of Jesus. “But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard’” (Acts 4:19-20).

Likewise, today it takes courage to speak out against evils in our society. Atrocious sins like abortion and homosexuality are often allowed to increase because we sometimes lack the courage needed to speak out against them. False doctrines are allowed to poison the minds of the masses, and we sometimes fail to correct them because boldness is deficient. May we all muster the courage to speak out as Mordecai did, and may we never cower in fear and let Satan have his way. Mordecai’s courage remained steady in spite of the possibility of future persecutions.

Mordecai was Consistent in His Reverence For God

Mordecai was aware that he could not show reverence in a worshipful manner to a man. Yet, Haman thought so highly of himself that he had the King make a decree for all the King’s servants to bow before Haman and pay homage to him. Mordecai refused, and that infuriated Haman. Disobeying a direct order from the King was a serious offense, but Mordecai was not about to compromise his faith in God. He knew that only God was truly worthy of worship, and he was not going to bow in worship to a mere man. Haman’s anger led him to seek to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom.

Reverence for man can be rightfully given, but not in a worshipful manner. Children are to honor their parents (Eph. 6:2). Wives are to reverence

their husbands (Eph. 5:33). As Christians, we are to honor elders, the government, and all men. But, this honor is not worship; it is respect.

When Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra on the first missionary journey, Paul healed a lame man, which led to Paul and Barnabas being deified. The people began to worship them as the gods Hermes and Zeus. Their response to the people was, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them" (Acts 14:15).

Peter faced a similar situation when he came to the house of Cornelius. Cornelius fell down at his feet and worshipped him. "But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man'" (Acts 10:26). God's faithful people have never been pleased to accept worship, nor have they worshipped other men. God alone is deserving of our worship, for He is our maker. "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand" (Psalm 95:6-7). May we never allow any person, whether politician, entertainer, athlete, preacher, child, parent, or spouse, become the object of our worship.

Mordecai Challenged the Younger Generation to Serve

Mordecai, being older, could have had the idea that he could handle the problem with Haman himself. Instead, he challenged the younger Esther to step up and to do what she could. Some older ones in the church today may have the attitude, "If I want it done right, I'll have to do it myself." That attitude does nothing to develop the talents of the younger generation, nor does it prepare the church for the future.

Paul took the younger Timothy under his wings as his "son in the faith". He then encouraged Timothy to train others, too. "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Our teens and youth need to be trained that Christianity is more than just playtime for them. They need to be trained in leading, teaching, visiting, and serving others. They will develop a deep appreciation and satisfaction knowing that they are a vital part of the local congregation. Sure, they will make mistakes. We all do. They need a chance to grow and opportunities to serve. Training classes, "young men's night", teacher's workshops, and Vacation Bible Schools are just a few of the areas where we can encourage our young people to get involved. They have potential – let us do what we can to help them develop it.

Mordecai gave Esther one tremendous responsibility which could have proved deadly. Esther rose to the occasion, and the result was the saving of

the Jews in Persia. Mordecai trusted the younger generation to get the job done, and Esther proved that it was the right thing to do.

Mordecai Confidently Trusted in God

Life must have been quite devastating for Mordecai when he found out that Haman had King Ahasuerus sign the decree to exterminate the Jews. Mordecai mourned in sackcloth and ashes, and, as the news of the decree spread, Jews in every province began to mourn deeply. Though God is not mentioned by name, Mordecai evidently was devoted to God, and placed his complete trust in Him.

There are three elements involved in trusting God. The first is finding out the right thing to do. For Mordecai, that meant, somehow, the king had to know the truth that Esther and Mordecai were Jews. With that knowledge, Mordecai hoped the king would act accordingly to somehow protect the lives of the Jews. For us today, we find out the right things to do by being careful students of God's Word. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

The second element of trust is taking it to God. For Mordecai, the mourning and fasting he did would lead us to think that prayer was involved, too. Praying for wisdom is encouraged by God. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Peter offers this advice when difficult decisions and problems arise: "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

The third element in trusting God is trusting Him with the results. When Mordecai told Esther that it was her time, her response was, "And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" (Esther 4:16b). When we pray according to God's will, then we must trust that all will work out for the best, and that God knows best.

Conclusion

Mordecai's heart was in the right place. His heart was large enough for Esther, all the Jews, and a king who was being plotted against. Mordecai impresses us even today as we learn lessons from his humble life. He cared for orphans, in taking his cousin, Esther, and being a father to her. He had the courage to speak out against evil, thus saving the king's life. He was consistent in his reverence for God, not bowing down to Haman. Mordecai challenged the younger generation to "step up to the plate" and take on mature responsibilities. He confidently trusted in God, and, after finding out the right

thing to do, trusted the results to God. Mordecai, a man behind the scenes, teaches us lessons for life.

ESTHER

Beth Cook

God's Word portrays many great, strong, and godly people. Among those portraits is the story of a great woman of God named Esther. Esther joins the ranks of other Bible characters that God placed and used in positions of authority and leadership to accomplish His purposes. Although the book of Esther does not specifically mention God's name, the theme of God's providential care is evident throughout the book. Matthew Henry says, "If the hand of God is not here, his finger is" (1121). This lesson is not about the book of Esther but about the character, Esther. There are many practical lessons we can learn from her, such as the power of one individual, faith, courage, and inner beauty. However, before studying specific attributes Esther modeled, it will be beneficial to gain perspective on her life by reviewing the events that developed in this short book.

The Story of Esther

The book of Esther is named for its main character, a Jewess, by the name of Hadassah (myrtle) and who later was given the Persian name of Esther (star). One of three books in the Old Testament that records Jewish history after seventy years in Babylonian captivity, the book of Esther follows the many Jews who stayed in the land of their captivity. While the author of the book is unknown, some attribute it to Mordecai, others to Ezra or Nehemiah.

The story takes place in the city of Susa, the Persian capital. King Ahasuerus, ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire, threw a huge feast for the most powerful nobles from his 127 provinces, while Queen Vashti made a feast for the women in the royal palace. When the king was drunk, he sent for Vashti "in order to show her beauty" (Esther 1:11). Furious, because Vashti refused his command to appear, the king banished Queen Vashti, fearing her example would cause other wives to rebel against their husbands. A search began for a new queen, and all the young, beautiful virgins were brought to Shushan for a national beauty contest. A young Jewish woman by the name of Esther, not revealing she was a Jew, won the king's favor and was selected to replace Vashti as queen.

Mordecai, cousin of Esther, who had raised her as his daughter, sat at the gate and uncovered a plot to assassinate the king and reported it to Esther, and she informed the king. This account and Mordecai's name was recorded in the king's chronicles. Not long after, the king promoted one of his noblemen, Haman. When Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, Haman devised a plan to annihilate the Jews. So a decree was written, sealed with the king's signet ring, and letters were sent to all the king's provinces to destroy and

annihilate all the Jews on a given day. Mordecai reported the plan to Esther, but she was reluctant to go to the king, having not been called. Unless the king extended his golden scepter to Esther, she could incur an instant death sentence! Mordecai pleaded with Esther to intercede on behalf of the Jews. Queen Esther summoned the courage to risk her life for her people. “And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!” (Esther 4:16). After fasting for three days, Esther approached the king and was extended the golden scepter. She invited the king and Haman to a banquet, and, for an unknown reason, postponed her decision to reveal Haman’s evil plot until a second banquet. Meanwhile, Haman’s indignation grew because of Mordecai’s refusal to honor him. With urging from his family and friends, Haman ordered gallows built with the intention of suggesting to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it. That night the king could not sleep and asked for the chronicles to be read to him, revealing that Mordecai had not been honored for saving the king’s life. Haman arrived at the palace early the next morning to ask the king’s permission to hang Mordecai, and the king asked him what should be done to the man whom the king wished to honor. Assuming the king wanted to honor him, Haman suggested the “royal treatment.” The king ordered him to give such honor to Mordecai. Soon the second banquet occurred; Haman’s evil plot was revealed; and the king ordered him killed.

Eventually, the decree to exterminate the Jews was counteracted by another decree which allowed the Jews to be victorious by defending themselves. The feast of Purim was instituted to commemorate the day of deliverance for the Jews. In chapter ten, the king elevated Mordecai to second to King Ahasuerus in the kingdom “seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen” (Esther 10:3). The events that transpired in the book of Esther occurred like they did because of Esther’s faith, courage, and character. What can we learn some 2500 years later from the attributes of Esther?

The Power of One

Because of the action of one person, an evil plan to destroy the Jews was averted. What if Esther had underestimated the significance of one and felt her lone actions could accomplish nothing? Mordecai admonished her, “For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish” (Esther 4:14). The message from Mordecai rang loud and clear. “Esther you must stand up, speak up, and possibly die. But you must not keep silent” (Swindoll 85).

We believe one individual can make a difference in this world today. Recently, my son received a writing assignment entitled, “The Power of One.” He chose to write his paper about the power one person possesses to save another person’s life by donating bone marrow. Because our family

experienced difficulty in finding a suitable bone marrow donor for my sister dying of leukemia, and because ONE person, from Sweden, willingly donated bone marrow, he understood the power of one! We are in the midst of an election year, and many will fail to exercise the privilege to vote, believing one vote will make little difference in the outcome. Yet, history records many occasions where one vote changed the outcome of an election. Feeling not needed in this world, we often choose to do nothing. Edward Everett Hale emphasized the power of one in this quote:

I am only one,
 But still I am one.
 I cannot do everything;
 But still I can do something;
 And because I cannot do everything
 I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.
 (as qtd. in Swindoll 75)

As a Christian woman, one life dedicated to God's service can make a difference and influence others for good. One Christian mother who seriously accepts her responsibility to teach and train her children in the Lord will improve the world and increase the population of heaven. A grandmother's faith, teaching, and influence impact generations to come for the Lord. What if Lois and Eunice had neglected their responsibility to Timothy? "When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5). "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3). What a price we will pay if we neglect our duties in our homes. Mothers, may we be known as the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:28. "Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her." One godly home may be responsible for many being lead to Christ. Leroy Brownlow says, "Just as one flower will crowd a home with sweet fragrance, so one life may sweeten a whole family" (51).

Not only can influence be felt in the home because of one godly woman but also in the church and the community. You and I influence everyone we come in contact with, either good or bad. Esther told Mordecai in Esther 4:16, "Go gather all the Jews in Shushan and fast for me, and my maids and I will do likewise." Because of her influence, others acted! Ladies, we influence others daily with our dress, our tongue, our sweetness (or lack of), our deeds, and our actions. Paul wrote, "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (2 Corinthians 3:2). Our lights must not be hidden under a bushel. Is it possible you are in a situation by God's providence where you can influence and make a difference "for such a time as this?" Even in death our influence lives on. Revelation 14:13 reads, "that they may rest from their labor, and their works follow them." Speaking of Abel, the scriptures record, "he being dead still speaks" (Heb. 11:4).

You are writing a gospel,
 A chapter each day;
 By deeds that you do;
 By words that you say;
 Men read what you write,
 Whether faulty or true,
 Say, what is the gospel
 According to you? (Brownlow 52)

May we realize the power of one in our daily lives and strive to become a modern day Esther. Encourage someone today. Send one card today. Make one telephone call today. Do one kind deed today. Make one visit today. Teach one person the Gospel today. Is it possible for one person to make a difference today? Christ did! "One seed can start a garden, one candle can light a room, one person can make a difference."

Faith and Courage

Esther personifies courage! Chosen above all the women in her land to become the queen, humble Esther chose to risk everything, including her life, to defend her family and her people. When called upon in a very difficult situation, her faith gave her courage. Hers was not a blind faith. Throughout her childhood, the training and example she received from Mordecai prepared her for the most significant role of her life. Mordecai's firm allegiance to God gave him courage to refuse to bow to Haman. No doubt, his courage strengthened Esther.

It's been said, "Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage comes in the face of fear" (Booher 70). Esther must have felt some apprehension, remembering the fate of Vashti, but she continued to take risky steps with confidence in her God. First, she approached the king's presence, having not been summoned in thirty days. Next, she invited Haman to her banquet with the king. Finally, she revealed Haman's evil plot. Can you imagine the thoughts stirring through her mind? What if the king was in agreement with Haman? Yet she knew she could accept life or death because of her faith in God. Remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3:16-18? Upon their refusing to worship the golden image the king asked, "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (Daniel 3:15). They responded, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace...But if not,...we do not serve your gods" (Daniel 3:17-18). Regardless of the outcome of situations, Christians can have faith in God and His eternal promises through His Word.

Unfortunately, many times we do not have the courage as Christians to stand for truth and do right. Perhaps we fear rejection, embarrassment, ridicule, or persecution. It took Nehemiah courage to finish rebuilding the

walls of Jerusalem when his enemies were mocking him (Nehemiah 4:1-2). Right living will bring persecution. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Our hearts and lives are constantly being confronted by Satan and evil, and we must have convictions and the courage to stand for them, even in the face of opposition. Mothers, are we instilling godly morals and values in our children even in a society that does not consider immorality sinful? Are we teaching our children the sanctity of marriage and the home? Are we teaching our children to stand for right even when it is not popular and they may face ridicule? “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

Ladies, do we have the courage to dress modestly when fashions by the world dictate otherwise? Modesty is STILL a Biblical subject! Do we have the courage to avoid sinful activities of the world? Christians are to be different. “Do you know friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4). We cannot flirt with the devil and then be shocked when we succumb to him! Do we have the courage to adhere to God’s role for women in the home and church, regardless of those who seek to change God’s Word to suit their own desires and a changing culture? God expects his children to develop faith and courage (2 Peter 1:5), but as God told Joshua, we need never feel alone (Joshua 1:6-9). “So we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:6).

Inner Beauty

All of the young virgins brought to Shushan to the custody of Hegai were physically beautiful according to Esther 2:23. Of Esther, it is said, “The young woman was lovely and beautiful” (Esther 2:7). However, Esther endeared herself to Hegai, the king, and others by an admirable quality far deeper than physical elegance—her inner beauty. Concerning Hegai it is said, “Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor” (Esther 2:9). Esther 2:15 records that, prior to approaching the king, “And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her.” Upon entering the king’s presence, her inner beauty again shone through. “The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the other virgins” (Esther 2:17).

Our society spends millions of dollars each year on products that promise beauty and youth. While there is nothing wrong with looking attractive, we must realize physical beauty will fade. We spend hours making ourselves physically presentable. How much time do we spend making ourselves spiritually presentable with inner beauty? “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised” (Proverbs 31:30). “For the Lord does not see as man

sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (I Samuel 16:7).

Esther’s inner beauty of the heart is displayed in various ways. Her inner beauty shines in her love, respect, and obedience to Mordecai as her father. She heeded his advice to keep secret her nationality for a time. “Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it” (Esther 2:10). “For Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him” (Esther 2:20). Again, she obeyed Mordecai in his appeal for her to approach the king. Upon the death of her parents, Mordecai had provided for her spiritually and physically as his own daughter. Esther honored him with her respectful and submissive behavior. Wonderful blessings are enjoyed in homes where God’s Word is taught by Christian parents, and children honor God by honoring parents, as did Esther (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Esther’s grace (“sense of decency and propriety”) and dignity (“quality being worthy of esteem”) also demonstrate the beauty of her heart. With the opportunity to be given whatever she desired by Hegai, she was content in that “she requested nothing but what Hegai the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised” (Esther 2:15). Her personality captured attention; her “shining,” positive attitude and disposition must have set her apart from the other women. One can only believe she did not display a sullen, sour demeanor. Perhaps this lovely woman sensed the purpose and plan God had for her, and she did not allow bitterness or resentment to enter her heart even in an uncomfortable situation. What an example Esther is for Christians today! How can we ever share the joy of Christianity if our hearts are full of pessimism and negative thoughts? Leroy Brownlow in his book, *Making the Most of Life*, states, “A sorrowful heart which manifests itself in a downcast countenance breaks the spirit of man; but a cheerful heart which shows itself in a smiling countenance lifts the spirit of man” (99). May we ever strive to develop a contented and joyful heart in spite of our circumstances (Philippians 4:4-13).

Beauty also radiated from Esther in her desire and willingness to serve God and man. God could have saved the Jews from another source. Esther, however, recognized the possibility that God had placed her as queen for this task. Recognizing her unique position as queen “for such a time as this,” Esther seized the opportunity to serve God and her people, even forsaking concern for her own life. Jesus, our ultimate example of service, “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

We, too, must understand that our service to God is not limited to what takes place within the walls of the church building. Truly, we must “enter to worship and leave to serve.” Jesus teaches in Matthew 25:35-46 that our

failure to minister to those in need is a failure to minister to Jesus himself. We often sing, “There is much to do, there’s work on every hand.....Here am I, send me.” Do I really want Him to send me, or do I grumble at the opportunities to serve those less fortunate? True love “does not seek its own” (1 Corinthians 13:5). Serving others may mean leaving our own comfort zone and involving ourselves in the lives of others and giving of our time, money and talents. There are folks who need compassion, companionship, food, clothing, shelter and the gospel. “Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today.” Am I willingly serving Christ by serving others?

Esther teaches us many other qualities of inner beauty such as humility, patience, tact, and self-control, especially verbal restraint. She could keep a secret! What lovely virtues we need to imitate from the life of Esther! Her life reminds us of the old adage, “Pretty is as pretty does.” True beauty is not what is seen by the eye, but what is in the heart of a person that comes forth in actions. Peter instructs women of all times how to achieve true inner beauty. “Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:3-4).

Conclusion

The story of Esther proves that God can take a humble person who is filled with inner beauty, and transform that one into a world-changing, history-making, people-blessing tower of strength. Esther, the “star” of the book, went from being an orphan in a foreign land, to the courageous queen who saved her people. Her story continues to inspire the importance of what just one person can do. Her courage and inner beauty spurs us to be wise servants of God.

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ELIJAH

Frank Higginbotham

One of the unique prophets in the Old Testament is the prophet Elijah. He was not a writing prophet. Jeremiah, Isaiah, and others did great service in recording their message for us today. However, what we know of Elijah is made known to us by what others wrote of him. This does not make him any less important in God's scheme of things. His name means "My God is Jehovah." This certainly was carried out in his life. In the New Testament he is known by the name, Elias. Some asked of John the Baptist if he was Elias. "And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No" (John 1:21). When he appeared with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration he is also called Elias. "And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him" (Matthew 17:3). Elijah appeared on the scene about fifty-eight years after the death of Solomon.

The condition of God's people was growing increasingly bad. They were becoming more and more involved in idolatry. Much of this was due to the influence of King Ahab, the king of Israel and his wicked wife, Jezebel. "And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that *were* before him" (1 Kings 16:29,30). "Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, who was the king of the Sidonians. Her father was also a pagan priest, and she followed in her father's footsteps."¹ "During this time the prophets of God were persecuted. For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water" (1 Kings 18:4).

These were very hard times for the faithful servants of the Lord. With idolatry and great wickedness becoming increasingly prevalent, it became clear that those who wanted to live in these sins were unhappy with any prophet who spoke out against them. The prophets then became the object of extreme persecution. This is the time frame when Elijah appeared on the scene. In our study of this great man we need to take a look at the major events in his life.

We are introduced to this prophet of God in his sudden appearance to King Ahab. This appearance gave occasion for Elijah to announce a great drought. "And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." (1 Kings 17:1). It

¹ *Elijah* by Gene A. Getz, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995, Page 6.

is important to note in this announcement that there would be no rain; Elijah made it clear that he was a servant of the Lord. Imagine how frightful this situation was. Elijah, an unknown was appearing before the King and declaring an unfavorable message. The Lord was with him. The prophecy that there would be no rain was not just an empty threat. This was the beginning of a three and a half year period without rain.

The New Testament book of James makes reference to this event. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." (James 5:17). Even this was not enough to bring repentance from Ahab and the children of Israel.

God did not abandon His loyal servant. Provision was made for his safety. God instructed Elijah to hide by the Brook Cherith. "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan." (1 Kings 17:3). This provided safety and water until the water in the brook dried up. Provision was also made for ravens to bring his food. "And it shall be, *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook." (1 Kings 17:4-:6). God did not forget His servant. He remained by the Brook Cherith until it dried up because of the drought.

This brings us to another major event in the life of Elijah. At God's instruction he went to Zarephath. "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which *belongeth* to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." (1 Kings 17:9). When he arrived at Zarephath he saw a widow gathering sticks. He requested of her some water and a morsel of bread. She replied that she did not have the provisions to fill his requests. She was gathering sticks to prepare a handful of meal and some oil for her son and herself. She had nothing more and, therefore, thought that she and her son would then die. She was assured by the prophet that she should fill his request. "For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth." (1 Kings 17:14).

This promise to her was *kept*. "And *the* barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah." (1 Kings 17:16). After a while the son of the widow fell sick and died. This was very hard for her to deal with, and she began questioning the prophet. Through Elijah, the son recovered his life and was returned to his mother. This was in response to a prayer offered by Elijah. This event fully convinced the widow that he was a prophet of God. "And the woman said to

Elijah, Now by this I know that thou *art* a man of God, *and* that the word of the LORD in thy mouth *is* truth.” (1 Kings 17:24).

The next outstanding event in the life of Elijah is the encounter he had with the prophets of Baal. When Elijah met Obadiah, he told him to go to King Ahab and announce that Elijah is here. With reluctance, Obadiah did as he was instructed. Elijah and the King stood face to face. Ahab tried to throw the blame for the problems in Israel on the Prophet. “And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art* thou he that troubleth Israel” (1 Kings 18:17). The real problem is explained by Elijah. “And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.” (1 Kings 18:18). He then issued a challenge. He would meet the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the groves on Mt Carmel. They were to offer their sacrifice to Baal, and then Elijah would call upon God. There was no answer from Baal. Elijah chided them because they had not received an answer. ‘And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he *is* a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, *or* peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.” (1 Kings 18:27).

It was then time for the Prophet to call upon God. He repaired the altar and had much water poured upon it. This was done three times. Elijah at this point offered his prayer to God. “Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench. And when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he *is* the God; the LORD, he *is* the God.” (1 Kings 18:39). Instruction was then given concerning the false prophets. “And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.” (1 Kings 18:40). Elijah again prayed and the dry period came to an end. A great victory had been won for God.

The next event in the life of Elijah was the period of depression that followed this great victory. “But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers.” (1 Kings 19:4). The Lord then made it known to Elijah that he was not standing alone. “Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18).

The time and work of this great prophet here on the earth was drawing to a close. Elisha had been chosen to take the place of Elijah. Elisha requested a double portion of Elijah's spirit, and this was granted. “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a

whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan". (2 Kings 2:13). This brings to a close the work of Elijah here on earth.

Many great lessons should be learned by observing the life of this prophet of God.

Elijah was a servant of God and he made this known in his very first recorded appearance. He did not fear to reveal to the King that he was God's servant. We also should be happy to recognize and make known that we are God's servants. We become God's servants when we are obedient to the gospel of Christ. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18).

Being a servant of God means that we recognize our life belongs to God. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Realizing this makes our life here have different direction than the lives of the non-Christian.

Our relationship to the world is different. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1,2). The most important thing in our lives should be our service to God.

The Lord taught us to seek first His kingdom. (Matthew 6:33). Jesus pronounced a blessing on the faithful servant of the Lord. "His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matthew 25:21). Elijah was not ashamed to be known as God's servant.

Elijah is described as being a man of like passions to us. This helps us to understand the depression that he faced after he won the great victory at Mt. Carmel. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed

earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” (James 5:17).

He had feelings like we do. His life was threatened by the wicked Queen Jezebel. “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.” (1 Kings 19:1-2). Such a threat from the Queen would not be taken lightly. Indeed, there must have been fear but this man had placed his trust in God who would be able to see him through. “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5).

Many Bible examples impress us with the fact that God cares for His servants. David believed that the same God who delivered him from a lion and from a bear would also deliver him from the champion of the Philistines. (1 Samuel 17:37). Paul set a great example for us as he lived with complete faith in God even in view of daily threats to his life. He was faithful even to the giving of his life for the Lord. “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Elijah was subject to feelings like we are, but he was faithful to the God who was able to give him the victory. “What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Another great lesson learned by looking at Elijah is that we must not be intimidated by our enemy. One of the great tools the devil uses in his battle against truth and righteousness is intimidation. Elijah did not back down before the King nor did he back off when threatened by the Queen.

Christians are urged to stand for the right. Threats and various forms of intimidation should not back us off. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore ...” (Ephesians 6:13-14). We are urged to speak up and let it be known where we stand. “Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;” (Psalm 107:2). The Atheist, the Abortionist, the Feminist, the Perverts, the Liberals, and a host of others are using intimidation to back down their opposition, but the servant of the Lord must speak up.

It is truly inspiring when we observe the servant Elijah depending on prayer at times of great importance. Elijah believed in prayer. His use of

prayer is highlighted by James in the New Testament as he explains that through prayer Elijah was able to successfully call on God to stop the rain. Later, he called on God to send the rain, and once more God answered his prayer.

Christians have the promise that God will hear and answer their prayers. “For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil.” (1 Peter 3:12). There is great comfort in knowing that God watches over us and even more in that he hears our prayers. If anyone in the world should believe in and practice prayer it should be those who are Christians. If God can bring victory to Elijah, then he can indeed give victory to us. “Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James 5:16).

Elijah had friends in whom he had confidence. Obadiah who was a friend to prophets and Elisha who later took the place of Elijah were among the people who gave aid to the prophet.

Christian people are inspired and encouraged by friends who are faithful to the Lord. We are commanded to assemble together because we need each other. Those who miss regularly the public worship periods of the church are robbing themselves of one of the great treasures of Christianity. “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25). Christian fellowship makes us stronger in the Lord. “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

A final lesson we learn by observing this man of God is that others will pick up the mantle and continue the work. The Lord’s work will not cease if you and I pass from this scene of action. Timothy had great faith. He received encouragement along this line from his grandmother and mother. (2 Timothy 1:5). Others will carry on the work which we love and for which we sacrifice. Paul encouraged us to teach other faithful brethren, and they will carry on the work that is to be done. “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2).

By observing the life of Elijah, there are many great lessons to be learned. God had some events of his life recorded in the Bible so we could profit from them. As his name implies, Elijah was a man whose God is Jehovah.

JEREMIAH

Phil Grear

Faithful preachers have two types of sermons – those they get to preach and those they have to preach. Most of Jeremiah’s fit the latter category. Circumstances did not allow him the “get-to-preach” kind.

Just a few miles northeast of Jerusalem was the little town of Anathoth. It was located on the edge of the wilderness leading to the Dead Sea. The inhabitants of this rocky, barren, and uninviting region eked out a difficult living from this difficult land. It was a life that would either toughen or destroy you. Growing up here toughened Jeremiah for the difficult tasks God had in mind for him. As a youth, he appears to have lacked self-confidence. When God told him he had been chosen before birth to be a preacher, he replied, “Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.” (1:6) But he was not to allow his youth to keep him from delivering God’s message. “But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.” (1:7-9)

Jeremiah lived during exciting, but terrifying, times. He was born during the close of the reign of King Manasseh and grew up under King Josiah. As a boy growing up among the priests of Anathoth, he would have heard much about Josiah’s religious reforms. He must have been thrilled at the prospect that Judah might be returning to the God she had abandoned. He must have also been sadly disappointed when the reforms turned out to be short-lived and Judah resumed her relentless descent to destruction.

During the forty years of his preaching he saw Judah gradually, but certainly, die. He watched four of Josiah’s sons ascend to the throne only to be removed by foreign powers, one way or another. Two of them reigned only three months each. He prophesied the end of the Davidic line of kings, and personally saw it happen. He lived through the siege and razing of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army. For the last four decades of her existence, he warned Judah of the coming destruction, only to be ignored, rebuffed, and persecuted for his efforts. At times he was so discouraged that he contemplated giving up, but God’s word within him would not be squelched. “For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could

not stay.” (20:8-9) He hated his own sermons, but had no choice but to preach them.

Jeremiah was the man for the times. He was determined, tenacious, resolute, and of sterling integrity and virtue. His was no “flash-in-the-pan” ministry. For forty years, under the worst circumstances, he faithfully and reliably proclaimed God’s message to an unrepentant people. God’s message took precedence over personal comfort and popularity. Continually rejected and relentlessly persecuted, he eventually died, probably in Egypt where he had been taken against his will.

Jeremiah Was a Man of Unswerving Loyalty

Jeremiah loved his God. His devotion was without reservation. Nothing would impel him to betray God’s trust in him. He was loyal in spite of loneliness. The people of his hometown of Anathoth sought to kill him. (11:21-23) His family turned against him. (12:7) God even forbade him to marry and have children. (16:1-4) He was falsely accused of being a traitor and attempting to desert to the Babylonians. (37:15). Eventually, it seemed his only friend was his faithful servant, Baruch. We hear the sadness in his words as he says to God, “I sat alone because of thy hand.” (15:17)

He was loyal in spite of an unpopular message. He would have been as loved as any prophet if he had just told the people what they wanted to hear, but that was out of the question. He warned them that their trust in the Temple was misplaced. God would destroy Jerusalem as he had Shiloh (where the Tabernacle had been located), and the presence of the Temple would not prevent that. (7:1-14) He wrote to the captives already in Babylon instructing them to settle down and make the best of their lives there, and so was accused of destroying their morale. He said the only way to survive the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem was to surrender, and so was accused of undermining the war effort. For this he was thrown into a muddy dungeon. (38:1-6). While in prison, he sent a message to King Jehoiakim warning of the coming destruction, only to have Jehoiakim cut up the scroll and throw it into the fire. Not to be stopped, Jeremiah sent the message again, this time with some additional words for Jehoiakim. (36:1-32) His message was unpopular, but loyalty to the truth meant it had to be preached.

He was loyal in spite of persecution. Few of God’s servants have suffered as did Jeremiah. He was placed in stocks. (20:2) He was threatened with execution. (26:11) He was imprisoned in the court of the Temple. (32:2) He was cast into a dungeon. (38:1-6).

He was taken forcibly into Egypt. (43:6). But nothing could stop that “fire in his bones.” He had no choice but to preach. (20:8-9)

May each of us learn from Jeremiah the determination to be loyal, no matter the cost. If Jeremiah could endure what he did, what excuse could we give for being disloyal to our King?

Jeremiah Was A Man of Undying Compassion

Preachers are sometimes asked, “How do you keep preaching when it seems no one is responding?” Two things keep the faithful preacher going - love for God and love for people. Without these the temptation to quit can be overwhelming.

These two factors kept Jeremiah preaching. He took no pleasure in the sermons he preached. The sin and wickedness of the people broke his heart, and it was with deep grief that he warned them of the serious consequences they would face. These were *his* people, and he loved them. He told them the truth, but only with great personal pain. “My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.” (4:19) “When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me.” (8:18) “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (9:1)

Jeremiah’s preaching was plain, but not mean-spirited. He was too loyal to God not to preach what he had to, but too compassionate toward his audience to enjoy doing it. They were God’s people, although they were not acting like it. Jeremiah loved them with all his heart. He considered himself one of them, and had no desire to see them hurt, and so he diligently, repeatedly, and fervently warned them. He could not abandon them. After the final defeat of Jerusalem, Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian general, offered him the opportunity to retire to Babylon and live out his days in comfort. Jeremiah refused, choosing to stay in Judah with the people of God, even though it meant suffering in their great poverty. “Then went Jeremiah unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land.” (40:6) He would not desert his people in their difficult times. They may not have wanted him, but he wanted them.

Those who follow Jesus will be characterized by compassion. The Bible repeatedly speaks of Jesus’ compassion on the people, particularly due to their lack of spiritual guidance. “And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.” (Mark 6:3 4) Certainly truth must be preached. Sermons must be forceful, strong, and uncompromising, but they also must be loving and compassionate. Preachers are dealing with people who are caught in “the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” (2 Timothy 2:26) They need to be warned, but

lovingly. We must always speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15). May God deliver us from preachers who will not speak the truth for fear of causing pain, but may he also deliver us from preachers who enjoy causing the pain.

Jeremiah Was A Man of Unfailing Hope

While in prison in Jerusalem, Jeremiah was approached by his cousin, Hanaineel, with the offer to buy a piece of ground in their hometown of Anathoth. God had made it clear that Judah's days were very limited. Already Zedekiah was on the throne, and he was to be the last of Judah's kings. So why would Jeremiah want to own a piece of ground that he probably would never actually control? But, at God's instruction, he bought the property. "And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. "So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: and I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanaineel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison." (32:10-12) God was telling his people, through Jeremiah, that the deportation to Babylon was not permanent, but they would return to Judah and live there again. "Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the LORD." (32:44) This purchase symbolized hope. Jeremiah fully believed God would bring his people home.

Hope was one of the main emphases of Jeremiah's preaching. In spite of the amount of time he spent warning and admonishing the people, he never forgot to give them hope. Five times Jeremiah said God will not make "a full end with you." (4:27; 5:10, 18; 30:11; 46:28) Yes, punishment was certain, but so was hope. Jeremiah knew awful events were coming, and he lived to see most of them; but he never gave up the hope he had based on God's promises.

One great example of Jeremiah's undying hope occurred late in his life. Jerusalem had finally been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's army. Most of Judah's inhabitants had been taken to Babylon. Only the "poor" of the land were left and were governed by a puppet governor named Gedeliah. A group of conspirators, under the leadership of Ishmael, assassinated Gedeliah. (41:1-2) Now fearing reprisals from the Babylonians, they decided to round up the people who were left and go to Egypt. Jeremiah warned them repeatedly not to go, but they ignored his warnings, even taking Jeremiah himself by force. As they journeyed toward Egypt they had to pass the ruins of the once great city of Jerusalem. As Jeremiah, now a tired old man, saw this heartbreaking sight, he

wrote five mournful poems that we know as the book of Lamentations. In the middle of the middle poem he wrote the following:

“This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.” (Lamentations 3:21-26)

Notice, he did not write this before the horrible events involved, when he might have comforted himself by saying, “Maybe it will not be as bad as we are thinking.” He did not write them after the event when he might have told himself, “It was not as bad as it could have been.” But he wrote it in the very midst of some of the worst of the suffering, when it had to seem the darkest. In the midst of one of the darkest hours, he wrote of the mercies and compassion of God. He wrote of God’s faithfulness and the hope He provided. Jeremiah knew that life’s lowest ebb is no time to give up on the promises of God.

Jeremiah lived to see the end of the life he had always known. The beautiful Temple of Solomon was destroyed in his day. The last of God’s chosen kings were either killed or taken captives almost literally in front of his very eyes. But he knew God was not done with his people. They would come back from Babylon, and God would send the One who would provide hope, not just for Jews, but for all mankind. Jeremiah promised,

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (31:31-34)

It would be a time when God’s law would not be written on stone tablets, but in human hearts. Sin and iniquity would be removed forever. It would be a time of great hope for those who “know the Lord.” Thank God we live in that wonderful time. (cf. Hebrews 8:8-12)

Hope is what Christianity is all about. Nothing in this world can defeat us as long as we cling to the hope God gives. Let the world throw at us what it will, hope makes it all worthwhile.

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us ... For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” (Romans 8:18, 24-25)

Hope of the next life makes it possible to bear anything.

Conclusion

Was Jeremiah a failure as a preacher? Many would say so. He preached for over forty years and had nothing really to show for it. The people rejected him, ignored him, persecuted, and hated him. They refused to repent and suffered everything about which he had warned them. But he was not a failure. He was faithful in his service to God, and that is all that matters. Jeremiah was as successful a preacher as has ever lived.

TIMOTHY

Will Montgomery

Timothy was a native of Lystra of Lycaonia, a province of Asia Minor or modern day Turkey. Paul, in 1 Timothy 1:2, refers to Timothy as his son in the faith. From this reference it is safe to assume that Paul had a part in Timothy's conversion. Who better than Paul, then, to prepare Timothy for his work as an evangelist? Paul had already gone through trials and tribulation, and his experience qualified him to teach Timothy. We have known of many older preachers who have helped and encouraged younger preachers, and, then, when those younger preachers have become older, they, in turn, have helped another younger preacher. Thus, the cycle continues.

Timothy's mother and grandmother were great teachers and examples to him. 2 Timothy 1:5 records the fact that his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, instilled in him the unfeigned faith. We know that Romans 10:17 tells us, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." We know, then, that his mother and grandmother taught him the word of God. We certainly need mothers and grandmothers like Timothy had. This teaching began with his grandmother, Lois, who in turn taught her daughter, Eunice, who in turn then taught her son, Timothy. Timothy was brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Through this teaching he learned wonderful and valuable lessons that stayed with him for the rest of his life.

To teach our children what the word of God has to say, we need fathers such as the Ephesian letter teaches us in Ephesians 6:1-4. The admonitions given there cover all aspects of family life. Children, obey your parents in the Lord; honour thy father and thy mother. Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath. Timothy's father is not named in the scriptures and neither is his grandfather, but we have these two wonderful women who were great examples and teachers to him. In society today, we have many absent fathers; those who literally are not around, and those who have not accepted their roles as spiritual leaders in the home. In cases like that, it is up to godly mothers to step in and take on the work of training their children in the way they should go. How many godly mothers and grandmothers have helped in the molding of great and gifted gospel preachers? T. B. Larimore would say that a godly mother's influence was a major contribution in the development of his preaching ability. Paul urges the young preacher Timothy to continue in the things once learned, knowing of whom he learned them.

Paul says, in 2 Timothy 3:15, "... that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." One of the greatest gifts that parents can give their children is to ground them in God's word. This type of teaching is what

produces preachers, elders, deacons; preachers', elders' and deacons' wives; and faithful Christians. We have to live it ourselves and teach it to our children; it doesn't happen by accident. Timothy's teaching and training at home and encouragement from an older and wiser preacher of the gospel helped to form and shape him to become a great preacher of the gospel of Christ. In 1 Timothy 1:2 and in 2 Timothy 1:2, Paul refers to Timothy as his son in the faith. He and Paul worked together closely for the cause of Christ on many, many occasions.

Many great lessons are taught in First and Second Timothy. In 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul tells Timothy to charge some that they teach no other doctrine. Neither give heed to fables. In 1 Timothy 1:4, Paul told Timothy that some would desire to be teachers of the law - understanding neither what they say nor whereof they affirm. We have so many preachers on TV today that fit that description, and some in the church. We need sound, faithful preachers who are not afraid to proclaim the truth. Paul said, "I commit this charge unto thee son Timothy, war a good warfare." (1 Timothy 1:8). We need to war a good warfare in the church today. Some have made their faith shipwreck. Paul tells Timothy to be strong and always stand for the truth.

In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul tells Timothy that we need to behave ourselves in the church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. As Christians, we need to be proper in our conduct, in our manner of life, and we need to be strong in our teaching. We cannot let false doctrine slip in. Shamefully, some have forgotten how to behave themselves in the church. This is evident in the teachings that are being supported in some congregations of the Lord's church. Ideas that we would never have thought would have been an issue. There are those in the church today teaching salvation by grace only, faith only, that instrumental music is acceptable, that women can have positions of leadership or can take part in public worship. This sad list could go on and on. The only way that false doctrine can come into the church is if we let our guard down. We must have strong teaching from the pulpit, and we must have strong elderships, who are like the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem found in Isaiah 62:6. They are there to warn us of impending danger. Paul warns Timothy in 1 Tim 4:1-5 of the false teachings that would come to pass, and, in verse 6, he urges him to "... put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ." Some today who claim to be gospel preachers will not even offer the invitation after a sermon. Why? Are they ashamed of the gospel? Romans 1:16 teaches us not to be ashamed of the gospel. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

Paul tells Timothy that it is needful for him to give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine. Paul stresses to Timothy the importance of study, not only to Timothy, but to all Christians. Preachers need to study,

study, and study more. They need to know what they are talking about. The souls of men are at stake. Paul tells Timothy just how important his preaching is in 1 Timothy 4:16, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." We need to teach and preach sound doctrine. Wouldn't it be sad if a gospel preacher did not know what sound doctrine was? Yet, there are some among us who do not know or choose not to know what sound doctrine is.

In 1 Timothy 6:20, Paul tells Timothy: "O Timothy keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called." The New King James version reads in this way, "O Timothy guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge." Paul urges Timothy to stay the course. Do not let anyone cause you to leave the truth. Remember that which I have committed unto you. What Paul gave Timothy through his teaching was so precious that it needed to be guarded, like we safeguard our valuables and those things which are precious to us. This treasure was placed in earthen vessels. 2 Corinthians 4:7. We have a job to do in the Lord's church. We must never forget our mission is to reach out to a lost and dying world and to make a difference in the lives of men. In verse 21, Paul told Timothy that some were professing false teaching and had strayed concerning the faith. Paul warns Timothy not to let this happen to him. Contrary to what some teach today we can fall from grace. We must stay strong and remember that we have something committed to our trust.

In 2 Timothy 1:2, Paul lovingly calls Timothy his son, my dearly beloved son. Paul says, "I have remembrance of you in my prayers." What a comfort that must have been for Timothy to know that this great man of faith was praying for him. Prayer is a needed part of our lives, both for ourselves and for others. Luke 18:1 says, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." Paul knew that Timothy would need prayer to fulfill his duties as an evangelist. Paul was mindful of the great affection that he and Timothy had for each other and the sadness that Timothy felt at being separated from him.

Paul charges Timothy to war a good warfare in 1 Timothy 1:18 and, in 2 Timothy 1:8, he tells him never to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor those who proclaim it. I have heard of some in the church who have brought visitors with them and then apologized for what was preached even though it was truth. Paul said, in Romans 1:16, never to be ashamed of the gospel or those who are preaching it. Paul admonishes Timothy, in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, to "... be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And to the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." We desperately need strong faithful men in the pulpits of the congregations of the Lord's church. Again, Paul tells Timothy to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Just as a soldier commits his life to his military service, so must a preacher of the gospel be

committed and devoted to his life's work. I ran across this article that sums up the duties that are required of a minister, not including his study and preaching of the word:

What Is A Minister?

Somewhere between the call of God and the heart of the hospital, there exists a specialist in everything and variously called a minister or a preacher. He is a hero to his wife, a stranger to his own children, a fine boy to his mother and an easy touch to the down and outers; a name on the mailing list of hundreds of agencies and organizations, an example to the flock.

To some he is a fuddy-duddy, to some he is a stuffed shirt, to some he is a character who never enjoys life by "living it up." To some he is a guy who has nothing to do but preach two thirty minute sermons a week. To others he is a person in whose presence you must not cuss, drink or smoke. To some he is a dear friend, a Johnny-on-the-spot. When death hovers near, he is the one whose ministry continues when the medics have done all they can do. He is the one who marries young lovers, prays with the sick, and buries the dead, but can't find enough time to mend his wife's iron. He is a promoter, a public relations director, a public orator, an errand boy, a typist, file clerk, a writer, business executive, prophet, counselor, bookworm, diplomat, human being (believe it or not), taxi driver, planner, pusher, and puller.

Many nights are spent visiting and doing "little things" that need attention. He is concerned about the church, about its progress, its faults, its failures, and how he, as a preacher can do better work in the task he is undertaking. The preacher has many headaches and problems which do not concern the average member, and of which they never do know. He wrestles many times for a solution to the problems of others who have come to him for help and advice. So the preacher is many in one. He is supposed to know what to do, what to say, when to say it, and how to say it on all occasions. To understand the work of a preacher is to appreciate him. He wants no pity, but please be patient, understanding and helpful. Brethren, remember to pray for him.

- Author Unknown

2 Timothy 2:3-6 warns against becoming entangled in the affairs of life and neglecting our duties as a Christian or as a preacher. People get caught up in activities, some wrong, some not wrong in and of themselves, but if they pull your focus away from serving God they become wrong. "And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful." (Mark 4:19) We

must not allow anything to interfere with our service. And, we must not get angry with the preacher when he preaches on these things.

Paul uses three examples, that of a good soldier, an athlete, and a farmer, to show that, in order to do your job well, you must do what is required and not let anything keep you from fulfilling your obligations. As a good soldier you must endure hardships, as an athlete in order to win the game you must play by the rules, and a farmer who has worked hard to have a good crop should be able to enjoy the first fruits of his labors. Paul is letting Timothy know that in order to be an effective preacher he must do all these things. This admonition applies also to each and every Christian.

Throughout these two books, Paul continually warns Timothy of things that were to come then and in the future. These admonitions are for us today, also. In 2 Timothy 3:1-6, Paul lists many things that were a problem then and that are problems now, perilous times, men loving themselves more than God, lying, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, to name a few. Paul was thankful for the early teaching that Timothy had received from his mother and grandmother and knew that would help to sustain him in times of trouble.

In 2 Timothy 4:1-2, we learn of the charge given by Paul to Timothy and to every gospel preacher.

“I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

And, in verses 3-4, we learn why he is making this charge to Timothy,

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

In verse 5, he charges him with what his obligations are,

"But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

Finally, in verses 6-8, Paul tells of the great reward that is laid up for not only Paul but also for all who are faithful to the end.

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,

which the Lord the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

A preacher was asked once if the pay for preaching was good, he replied, “It’s not too bad, but the retirement is out of this world.”

The two books of 1 and 2 Timothy, written by Paul to instruct, strengthen, and encourage a young preacher are not only helpful to faithful gospel preachers, but also to all faithful Christians everywhere. Timothy stands as a good example.

As preachers of the gospel, and as children of God, we must not let the light of the gospel be hid. “But if our gospel be hid it is hid to them that are lost.” 2 Corinthians 4:6. We must make every effort to teach those who are lost. Time is short, and eternity is long. We must work while we have the opportunity.

Listen to the words of this reading:

Just a Minute

I have only just a minute
Just sixty seconds in it;
Forced upon me - can't refuse it,
Didn't seek it, didn't choose it.
I must suffer if I lose it,
Give account if I abuse it;
Just a tiny little minute
But eternity is in it.

- Author Unknown

I AM THE TRUTH

David R. Powell

John 14:6

Objective: To answer the age-old question, “What is truth?”

Introduction:

1. Jesus, as he appeared before Pilate, revealed that He had come into the world to bear witness of the truth; Pilate responded by asking: “What is *truth?*” (Jn 18:38).
2. In response to this age-old agnosticism we will clarify the absolute -- “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (Jn 8:32).”
3. Our lesson will be logically divided into three divisions that maintain a steady flow to the destination of answering the question, “What is *truth?*”

Body:

- I. RELATIVISM: “What is *Truth?*” (John 18:38).
 - A. “What is Truth?”
 1. One must wonder as to what Pilate’s attitude was when he asked, “*What is truth?*”
 - a. Was it a sarcastic tone that he used?
 - b. Or was he simply reflecting the thinking of his day?
 2. Tom L. Bright provides some helpful insight as to the thinking pattern of the first century.

The Epicurean and Stoic schools of thought arose about 300 B.C. Although existing for more than five centuries, their success in convincing men that they held the key of knowledge steadily decreased. About the same time, Pyrrho founded a skeptical school; if any philosophy had the ascendancy about the time the events of the New Testament transpired, it was skepticism. Clark adds that this school passed through several hands, finally coming to Agrippa about 100 AD. Agrippa's achievement was to reduce the skeptical arguments to five points: 1) opinions differ on all subjects; 2) to prove the truth of one's opinion, philosophers have recourse to a second, and so on ad infinitum; 3) to escape this regress, they go around in a circle; 4) they make an assumption, which only begs the question. Finally, all objects are relative to the subject, as Aenesidemus so clearly showed, and hence nothing can be known as it really is by itself. In all probability, it is the basic philosophy from which Pilate's question came, that is, with a viewpoint that truth could not be known as it really is.¹

B. It seems that there is nothing modern about postmodernism.

1. Thinking of our day has been traced from the philosophy of *relativism to postmodernism*.

A national magazine featured an article in the January 8, 2001 edition and announced on the cover of the magazine, "The Year One AD."

The article is introduced with the assertion, "Life was nasty, brutish, and short 2,000 years ago, but the issues of the day were surprisingly modern."²

2. The issue of relativism that Gospel preachers address today were problems in the first century.

1. Tom Holland writes:

¹ Tom L. Bright. "What Is Truth?" as found in *John*. William S. Cline, editor (Sixth Annual Firm Foundation Lectureship, Ridgedale church of Christ—Chattanooga, TN, Oct. 8-12, 1998), page 335-336.

² Thomas H. Holland, *Encouraging Expository Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Penmann Books, 1981), page 17.

The British author, Paul Johnson, traced the origin of relativism to the 1920's era when in response to Einstein's theory of relativity "the belief began to circulate, for the first time as a popular level, that there were no longer any absolutes: of time and space, of good and evil, of knowledge, above all of value. Mistakenly, but perhaps inevitable, relativity became confused with relativism." Johnson further asserted that "the public response to relativity was one of the principal formative influences on the course of twentieth-century history."³

2. The Barna Research Institute reveals that three of every four Americans believe the philosophy. In discussing the "State of the Nation" the Barna report declared, "Absolutes are anathema." The report states:

Perhaps the bottom line is what our research first noted in 1991 as being a cornerstone of the cultural demise: the rejection of absolute moral truth. Our most recent studies have found that things seem to be getting worse rather than better. Today, three out of every four adults do not believe that there is such a thing as absolute moral truth.⁴

3. Webster defines "*relativism*" as "the theory of ethics or knowledge which maintains that the basis for judgment is relative, differing according to events, persons, etc."

C. What are some of the effects of relativism upon American culture?

1. *Homosexuality*: Some Americans do not know the difference between male and female.

³ Thomas H. Holland, *Encouraging Expository Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Penmann Books, 1981), page 19-20.

⁴ Barna as referred to be Tom Holland. *Encouraging Expository Preaching* (Brentwood, TN Penmann Press, 2000), page 20.

Sister Childers was being interviewed on her 90th birthday. The young interviewer asked her what she thought about the “*Women's Lib Movement*.” Sister Childers wasn't sure what the movement was, and the reporter explained the movement to her. Sister Childers responded:

“There are things that men ought to do and there are things that women ought to do and we have no business getting them all mixed up.”

We have a lot of mixed up folks in America--thanks to relativism.

2. *General integrity*: Remember the presidential response to a simple question - "It depends on what the definition of the word "is," is!"
3. The “*Cultural Church*” springs out of the philosophy of relativism.
 - a. Do we sing or play?
 - b. The postmodernists among us are now doing both - an a cappella service along with an instrumental service.
 - c. The community church, where truth doesn't matter, is an outgrowth of relativism.

[All the social ills and cultural church issues of our day can be traced to the problem of relativism. Americans, in the face of relativism, need to know that there is revelation.]

D. Beware of the philosophy of relativism” - Col 2:8

II. REVELATION: “*I Am the ... Truth*” (John 14:6).

- A. Our confused world needs clarification.
1. Those confused *sexually* need to know that God made us as male and female.
 2. The “*cultural church*” needs constant reminding that it matters how we worship and serve the God of heaven.
 - a. *Worship: “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” - Jn 4:24.*
 - b. *Way of Sanctification: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” - Jn 17:17.*
 3. Truth and only the truth can set us free from the philosophy of relativism (Jn 8:32).
- B. The apostles of Jesus, during the most confused time in their life, needed an answer to the question posed by Pilate: “What *is truth?*”
1. Jesus, in the upper room, stated: “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” – Jn 14:6.
 2. Truth is not simply a body of factual information, but is embodied in the Christ.
 - a. Truth is a word for both the Son of God and the Word of God (Jn 14:6; 17:17).
 - b. God’s will was communicated to man through the One called “the Word” (John 1:1).
 3. Forty years ago our brotherhood debated whether it was “The

Man or the plan.”

- a. The truth of the matter is that you cannot distinguish the Man from the plan.
- b. Preaching Christ involves preaching baptism, as we see in the case of the Eunuch (Ac 8).
4. Jesus revealed every moral aspect of the Father - Jn 14:7-11

C. Truth has many characteristics.

[God’s word is *able* (word play).]

1. *Reliable.*

- a. When we identify someone as deceptive, we tend to discount most of what he or she says.
- b. The word of Jesus is so reliable that He spoke the material world into being - John 1:1-3.
- c. Mark records the amazement of Jesus’ disciples when he stilled the storm: “ ... even the wind and the sea obey Him!” - Mk 4:41.

2. *Unchangeable.*

MODEL OF MATRIMONY- Eph 5 (Remains Unchanged)

- I. LOVE SUBMITS - Vs. 22-24.
- II. LOVE SACRIFICES - Vs. 25.
- III. LOVE SANCTIFIES - Vs. 26-27.
- IV. LOVE SATISFIES - Vs. 28-30.
- V. LOVE SEPARATES - Vs. 31a.

- VI. LOVE STICKS - Vs. 31b.
- VII. LOVE SHARES-Vs. 31c
- VIII. LOVE SIMULATES - Vs. 32.
- IX. LOVE SPECIALIZES - Vs. 33

3. *Attainable.*

- a. Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." - Jn 8:32.
- b. Paul tells us how truth is attained (Eph 3:3-4): "*revelation*" is "*written*" so we can "*read*" and "*understand*"
- c. The link between revelation and knowledge is found in the word "*study*" (2 Tm 2:15).

4. *Applicable.*

- a. God's word meets our needs.
- b. It is applicable to 21st century needs - (Hb 4:12.)

III. RESPONSIBILITY: Jesus said to Pilate, "*Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice*" (John 18:37).

A. Negatively viewed.

- 1. Truth must never be *abused* "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Judges 17:6
- 2. Truth must never be *abandoned*
 - a. My son is the type of person that once he possesses something, he doesn't want to let it go - his 1971 Jeep

CJ5 is costing dad, yet he holds on.

- b. I hope my son applies such to the truth: Buy the truth, and do not sell it.” - Pr 23:23.

3. Truth must never be *altered*: Neither to the right or to the left.
4. We must never be *ashamed* of truth - Rm 1:16-17.

B Positively viewed.

1. Truth must be *appreciated* (I hope this lesson accomplishes such).⁵

- Truth helps us grow (1 Pt 2:1).
- Truth assures proper knowledge (2 Tm 3:7).
- Truth purifies the soul (1 Pt 1:22).
- Truth has part in the new birth (Jm 1:18).
- Truth helps a person become strong and stable (Eph 6:14).
- Truth is a shield and buckler (Ps 91:4).
- Truth leads to freedom from sin (Jn 8:32).
- Truth is essential in sanctification (Jn 17:17).
- Truth leads to salvation (Eph 1:13).
- Truth has preserving power (Ps 40:11).

2. Truth must be *attained*.
- a. As implied in the word “*study*.”
- b. There is no still small voice.
3. Truth must be *applied*: “Be ye doers of the word (Jm 1:22).”

⁵ J.J. Turner, *How to Effectively Study the Bible* (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1988), page 24.

Conclusion:

1. Jesus Christ, the Word, is the revelation of truth.
2. Only the foolish man, as in the case of the foolish builder, rejects the Word.

An atheist was complaining that atheists did not have their special holidays such as Christmas and Easter (we understand to the true Christian such are not special days authorized by the word of God). The Christian responded, "What about April the first?"

3. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

DAVID

Aaron Snider

David is one of the most well-known characters in the Bible. He is the first character that many parents teach to their children. I remember learning of David at a very young age, not only from my parents, but also in my Bible classes. So, still being quite young, I was very pleased when I was asked to speak on this lectureship concerning the character of David.

The story that children are most familiar with, concerning David, is his slaying Goliath the Philistine. Adults are not only familiar with that story, but are also familiar with his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and the events that followed due to his trying to cover up this sinful act. However, Bible students also remember that, in Acts 13:22, David is referred to as a “*man after God’s own heart.*”

David was the youngest of eight sons of Jesse, (1 Samuel 16:10-11); his grandfather was Obed; his great-grandfather was Boaz and his great-grandmother was Ruth. (Ruth 4:13-17; Matthew 1:5-6) Other than this, the scriptures tell us nothing of David’s personal life, until Samuel anoints him as the future king of Israel, at which time he was a shepherd of his father’s sheep.

David is indeed a character that we can learn much from. David was a brave, courageous man, even at a young age. He was also a great and righteous king; he was the second king of the nation of Israel. However, David was also human, and faltered at times, as we noted earlier. The most important thing about the character of David is that he was a man of God.

Throughout the remainder of this lesson we are going to look at the character of David and see what we can take and learn from it and hopefully be enriched by his example. We will first look at the sin in his life, mainly his situation with Bathsheba and what was involved, and then we will look at the positive qualities in his life that made him truly a “*man after God’s own heart.*”

David Was Human

Often times, I hear of people refusing to obey the gospel for fear that they have to be perfect, or that some things that they have done in their lives are so terrible that God could never love and forgive them. David had sin in his life just as everyone who is a child of God does, and the scriptures give us great details concerning his sin with Bathsheba and the events that followed. (2 Samuel 11) In studying David in the scriptures, it seems that he spent the rest of his life trying to make up for what he did with Bathsheba. Notice what He says in Psalm 51: 1-4,

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgression and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight.”

It certainly seems, from reading this passage of scripture, that David’s sin with Bathsheba was always in his mind; which, in turn, motivated him to do right because he had done evil against God. As was mentioned earlier, even the greatest men in the Bible had sin in their lives. Abraham lied about Sarah being his wife to save himself (Genesis 12:10-20); Judah committed fornication with Tamar (Genesis 38); and Peter denied knowing Christ three times (Matthew 26:69-75). However, these men were sorrowful for what they had done and went on to serve God faithfully. We need to understand ourselves and help others to understand that we are not going to be perfect and that there will be sin in our lives. The question is, what will we do to make the situation right? If the person is outside of Christ, he or she must obey the gospel to be cleansed from his or her sins through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). If we have become unfaithful as a Christian, we need to repent and ask for forgiveness.

Thankfully, the Bible tells us how we can combat temptation and sin. First, we must understand that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle and will always provide the way of escape (I Corinthians 10:13). James tells us, in the second place, that we should resist the devil and he will flee, and to draw nigh unto God (James 4:7). This is exactly what David did. He drew ever closer to God, which leads us into our next point.

David Loved God’s Word

Psalm 119 is a chapter that is dedicated to respect and love for God’s word, and there are many verses that indicate David had a deep respect and love for God’s word. *“And I will delight myself in thy commandments which I have loved.”* (119:47) *“Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.”* (119:97). This great chapter also tells us why David loved God’s word. It protected him from sin, 119:11; it comforted him in affliction, 119:50; and it gave him peace, 119:165. These are just a few of the reasons. We, as New Testament Christians, need to have this kind of deep love and respect for God’s word. Christ said, in John 14:15, *“If you love me keep my commandments.”* And John stated, in I John 2:3, *“And hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.”* So, if we want to truly know God and Jesus Christ, not only must we be obedient to the word of God, but we must also love and respect it and be faithful to it.

David Hated Every False Way

David, through his devotion to God and his love and respect for God's word, hated every false way. *"Through thy precepts I get understanding, therefore I hate every false way."* (Psalm 119:104) David believed with all his heart that all of God's word was truth, which also motivated him to hate every false way, or any way that was against God. *"Therefore I esteem all they precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way."* (Psalm 119:128)

We need to have this type of heart and this type of deep love and respect for God and His word now more than ever. This country is in dire straits because God and His word are being taken out of everything. Even in the religious world people don't believe in the word of God like they used to. They claim that parts of it are inspired and parts are not. They need to take a look at what David said concerning God's word and what Paul said, in I Timothy 3:16-17. And, as preachers, elders, teachers, and Christians, we have a duty to love the truth and to teach the truth to others.

David Loved To Pray

"I Love Jehovah because He heareth my voice and my supplications. Because He inclined His ear unto me. Therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." (Psalm 116:1-2) David loved to pray to God, and did so daily, because God had heard and answered his prayers before (1 Samuel 17:37, 47; Psalm 46:1).

David also loved to pray because God had so greatly blessed him. *"What shall I render unto Jehovah for all His benefits towards me?"* (Psalm 116:2) and because it brought him closer to God and it brought God closer to him. *"Jehovah is nigh unto all them that call upon Him. To all that call upon Him in truth."* (Psalm 145:18)

As children of God today, we should love to pray as well. This is a great blessing that is bestowed upon the children of God. We are told, in Matthew 6:9-13, to pray for our daily needs. In James 1:5 we are told to pray for wisdom. And, in I John 3:22, we are told that if we are keeping God's commandments and doing what is pleasing in His sight, that He will answer our prayers. However, we also need to pray thankfully. Many times we go to God with requests and forget all of the blessings that He has given us. We need to remember that all of our blessings come from God, James 1:17.

David Loved Friendship

This may seem like a strange point, but I think we need to be very careful about who our closest friends are going to be. If you have friends that are

children of God, it is going to be so much easier to live the life that is pleasing to God.

David gives us a perfect example in His friendship with Jonathan. They were both faithful servants of God and they loved each other very much. We should all take note of this friendship (1 Samuel 18:1-3; 20:17).

We are told by Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:33, what evil companions can do to us, so it is, indeed, important that we have Godly friends. The greatest thing about being a child of God and a servant of Jesus Christ is that we have Christ as our friend. Listen to how Christ describes it, in John 15:14-15, "*Ye are My friends, if ye do the things which I command you.*" There is not a greater friend to be found than Jesus Christ, and all we must do is be faithful to Him and keep His commandments.

David is indeed one of the greatest servants of God to ever live, and I am glad that I was able to present a lesson concerning a few aspects of his life. There are many more things we could discuss; time, however, would not allow it. I hope this lesson has been helpful in some small way to you as the listeners. I know I benefited from studying and preparing for it.

I would like to thank brother Nick Deiger and the elders here at the Pumpkin Center Church of Christ for inviting me to speak on this lectureship. It has indeed been a privilege. I would also like to thank brother Albert Farley for putting so much time and effort into putting this book together and for the time and effort he puts into putting the *West Virginia Christian* together. It is a wonderful publication.

Again, let me say thanks and God bless.

SAMUEL: "...AND YAHWEH HE WAS WITH HIM..."¹

John F. Board

From birth to death, the presence of the Lord was with his servant, Samuel. Samuel's appearance at a dark period in the history of Israel was no accident. Davis and Whitcomb note in their work entitled *A History of Israel: From Conquest to Exile*:

Out of the confusion and turmoil of the period of the judges arises one of the great figures of Old Testament history, the prophet Samuel...With the death of Samson, the country was disunited and leaderless. The Philistines were achieving greater strength and realizing significant victories as they directed their campaigns to the east. Corruption in the priesthood and moral scandals in connection with tabernacle worship (1 Sam. 2:22) rendered the nation of Israel weak and impotent. This was also a time of very limited prophetic influence (1 Sam. 3:1) (p.186).

H. I. Hester in his work entitled *The Heart of Hebrew History: A Study of the Old Testament* notes:

The transition from the dark and chaotic days of the Judges to the glorious era of the Kings was not a sudden nor an accidental one. It came gradually and was effected largely through the life and influence of one man, Samuel. He is called by some the last of the Judges. Others think of him as the first big figure in the new era. Really he was both. He spanned the chasm between the two, closing one period and opening another. He rendered a very valuable service to his nation. In many respects he was the greatest leader between Moses and David (p.165).

The Lord's providential presence with Samuel in his role of prophet and priest has caused some to place Samuel second only to Christ in this dual role.

The purpose of this study is to trace briefly the life of Samuel as it is providentially intertwined with other characters on the pages of scripture. The methodology for this study will include an examination of Samuel and the School of Prophets, Samuel and Hannah, Samuel and Eli, Samuel and Saul, Samuel and David, as well as concluding thoughts on Samuel and his God.

¹ 1 Samuel 3:19 MT

Samuel and the School of the Prophets

Although there were individuals who were known as prophets before Samuel (70 elders, Numbers 11:25; Judges 6:8; and Moses, especially Deut.18:18; etc), the New Testament writers seem to recognize a sense in which Samuel was unique. The inspired writer of Acts twice alludes to Samuel's connection with the prophetic office. In Acts 3:24, the text states "Yea and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days," and in Acts 13:19-20 the text states, "...and after these things he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet." The Hebrews writer notes, "And what shall I more say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets" (Heb.11:32). Edward J. Young in his work *My Servants the Prophets* may provide an answer for the New Testament references to Samuel and the prophets. He writes:

Since, according to 1 Samuel 3:1 the Word of God was rare in those days when Samuel was yet a child, we may assume justly that bands of prophets were not yet in existence. They arose during the lifetime of Samuel, after his childhood. In all probability they owed their origin to him, although the Scripture does not explicitly declare this. There are reasons, however, for believing that Samuel was the human founder of these prophetic bodies. For one thing, the designation employed in 1 Samuel 19:20, may teach that Samuel was self appointed over the prophets.² At any rate, whether this be so or not, he is pictured as the leader of the group. Its direction, at least, was under him (p.90).

As there was no organized prophetic office before Samuel, he appears to have originated both the prophetic office and the School of the Prophets.

Rex Turner Sr. in the 1975 *Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary* (published by Gospel Advocate) provides some information on the Schools of the Prophets. This writer will include much of that information here as the information's source will not be readily available to most readers of this lecture. This writer, though, will add in italics his concerns regarding Dr. Turner's thoughts where appropriate:

1. Those who attended the Schools of the Prophets were known as "the sons of the prophets (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3,15; 4:28; 5:22; 6:1). *These men were also referred to as "band of prophets" or "company of prophets."*

² The Hebrew word in this passage may have a reflexive force and could be translated "standing as *self-appointed leader* over them" (explanatory footnote added by this writer and not in Young's original quote).

2. Those who attended the Schools of the Prophets were, for the most part at least, young men (2 Kings 5:22; 6:17; 9:1-4). *This writer believes it would be better to state that the schools of the prophets “included” young men.*
3. Those who attended the Schools of the Prophets lived in communities and ate in common or dining hall style (2 Kings 4:38-41). *This writer believes it is better to state Elisha and the sons of the prophets enjoyed a common meal while at Gilgal. See 2 Kings 6:1-ff for additional information regarding living in communities.*
4. The sons of the prophets were, at least generally speaking, married men (2 Kings 4:1). *Perhaps it is better to say the sons of the prophets included married men.*
5. The chief or headmaster of the Schools of the Prophets was called “father,” and/or “master” (1 Sam. 10:12; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 12; 4:43; 6:5, 15).
6. The chiefs or headmasters of the Schools of the Prophets were older and well-known prophets of Israel (2 Kings 4:38-44; 6:3, 9:1-9).
7. The sons of the prophets rendered due respect and obedience to their master—they were his servants or attendants (2 Kings 4:12; 5:20; 6:3, 15; 19:3).
8. The “father” or “master” of the Schools of the Prophets showed fatherly care for the sons of the prophets and also for their wives and children (2 Kings 4:1-7). *Perhaps better to state that Elisha, one of the fathers of the sons of the prophets, showed fatherly care for a widow of the sons of the prophets.*
9. The sons of the prophets, on one occasion at least, built a school chapel or house by their own initiative and labor (2 Kings 6:1-7).
10. Admission to the Schools of the Prophets seems to have been freely granted on the basis of a young man’s desire and spiritual fitness for the office (2 Kings 6:1-7). *This writer believes this reference to be a typographical error in Turner’s original material as it does not seem to fit the information given.*
11. The prophets lived by their own labors in agricultural pursuits and by free will offerings (1 Kings 19:19; Amos 7:14-15; 1 Sam. 9:7-9; 2 Kings 5:15, 20, 22, 26).
12. The course of study in the Schools of the Prophets included the study of the Law of Moses (1 Sam. 10:5). *Again this writer believes a*

typographical error in the original has resulted in an improper reference. Perhaps the reference here is 2 Kings 17:13.

13. There were Schools of the Prophets at Ramah, at Bethel, at Gilgal, at Gibeah, and at Jericho. *There is some speculation involved here especially with Gibeah.*

14. The Schools of the Prophets at Gilgal and Jericho had enrollment each of a minimum of one hundred prophets (2 Kings 4:38-41; 1:5-7, 16). *Dr. Turner should have extended his reference to at least verse 43 of 2 Kings 4 and the reference of 1:5-7, 16 should read 2 Kings 2:5-7, 16.*

15. The prophets preached from town to town, in the country and in the city—in all the public places and especially at the city gate.” (p.141)

Most likely Samuel’s connection to the prophets as recorded in the New Testament has to do with his headship of the School of the Prophets and his beginning of the prophetic “office” in Israel. The School of the Prophets was a great spiritual force in Israel because the prophets spoke on behalf of God. Samuel served as a priest and judge in Israel, but arguably his greatest role was as prophet and “master” of the School of Prophets. All of this was possible because the LORD was with Samuel.

Samuel and Hannah

The providence of God is clearly seen in the birth and life of Samuel. This is no surprise for the providence of God is seen in the birth of another great leader of Israel, Moses. Like Moses, Samuel had a mother whom God used to guide him in the ways of the LORD. Hannah was married to a man named Elkanah. Elkanah was from an area in the hill country of Ephraim that’s name meant “two high places of the watchman.” Sadly, Elkanah, like some before him (Gideon, Jair), did not follow God’s original plan for marriage—one man and one woman for life (Gen. 2:15-ff). Elkanah was a polygamist and with his polygamy came many problems for Hannah, whom he probably married first. (The fact that Hannah was given “a double portion” when the family would go to Shiloh seems to indicate that she was Elkanah’s first wife).

Elkanah’s other wife was named Peninnah. 1 Samuel 1:2 reveals the difference between Hannah and Peninnah; Peninnah had children but Hannah was barren. The text also reveals that Peninnah, Hannah’s rival, would provoke her grievously to irritate her; Hannah endured such from Peninnah three times each year as they would go up to Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:6-7; see also Exodus 23:14-17). The text reveals the sadness of Hannah that included crying, not eating, and a heaviness of her heart (vs.7-8).

It was while she was suffering through a deeply distressing time that Hannah chose to turn to God. Through her prayer and vow, Hannah made an agreement with God; if God would give her a son, then she would dedicate her son to the LORD.³ God answered Hannah's prayer, and Hannah named her son accordingly, *semua 'el*—heard by God (1 Samuel 1:20). In keeping with her vow, after Samuel was weaned, Hannah took him to Shiloh; and, after offering the appropriate sacrifices, she dedicated Samuel to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:24-28). After she fulfilled her vow, she praised her God; Hannah's knowledge of her God is great indeed as she emphasizes His holiness, knowledge and power; she even seems to know of Moses' prophecy of a coming King (Deut. 17:14). In many ways, Hannah's statement of praise is like that of Mary (Luke 1:46-55). Hannah is blessed and her womb is opened allowing her to bear three more sons and two daughters (1 Samuel 2:20-21).⁴

The LORD truly was with Samuel. Samuel was blessed with a godly mother. Hannah continued to care for Samuel; each year, upon their return to Shiloh, she would bring him a garment she had made with love. His mother helped him to become a great leader in Israel. It was God who allowed Hannah to give birth to Samuel.

Samuel and Eli

At the close of Hannah's petition of praise the text reveals that Samuel was living in Shiloh ministering as a servant to the LORD in the presence of Eli, but the text also reveals that Samuel was in the presence of the LORD (1 Samuel 2:21). Many verses indicate Samuel's role as a servant of God under Eli (1 Samuel 1:28; 2:18, 21, 26; 3:1).

It is while Samuel was serving under Eli that he received his call from God. The word of the LORD was rare in the days of Samuel. The lack of revelation from God could explain why Samuel did not know that God was calling to him. Three times the LORD called to Samuel, and, each time, Samuel believed it was the aged Eli calling. After the third call, Eli finally realized that it was God who was calling Samuel. Upon Eli's instructions, the next time Samuel heard God call, he said "Speak LORD thy servant hears." God's message to Samuel was not an easy one for him to bear; Samuel had to report to his "superior" that God was going to destroy his house. Samuel lay all night afraid to tell Eli what the LORD had spoken, but with encouragement from Eli, Samuel spoke the heart-breaking news to Eli. Samuel was faithful to the LORD, and the text reveals that the LORD was with him.

In contrast to Hannah and Elkanah, Eli had not dedicated his children, Hophni and Phinehas, to the LORD. He had failed as a parent by not helping

³ Hannah promises to make Samuel a lifelong Nazarite - the requirements of which included the abstinence from wine, not allowing a razor to touch the hair, and refraining from touching a dead carcass (Num. 6:3-6).

⁴ For further information on Samuel and Hannah see Brenna Board's lecture elsewhere in this book.

his sons know the LORD. When Eli offered counsel and rebuke to his sons they would not listen. They continued to violate the law of God and steal from God and the people (Lev. 7:34). Before Samuel's message, Eli had been warned by a man of God about his sons. Because of their actions, they would die.

After the death of Samson, the Philistines had grown in their power. They had defeated Israel at Aphek. Hophni and Phinehas agreed with the plan of the people to take the Ark of the Covenant into battle. This unauthorized act led to their deaths and also to the death of their ninety-eight year old father, Eli. The Ark was taken into captivity. The news caused the wife of Phinehas to give birth to a child she named Ichabod which means "no glory." With the Ark gone, the glory had departed from Israel.

Samuel and Saul

The Ark, which for some time remained with the Philistines, was a source of trouble for them. The Ark was returned to the Israelites in Bethshemesh and later taken to the home of Abinadab in Kirjath-Jearim. Samuel urged the people to return to God. As the people did so, God's presence returned to Israel and they were victorious in battle at the very place they had been defeated twenty years earlier. Samuel set a stone in this place and called its name Ebenezer (stone of help).

Samuel judged Israel until he was old. His sons had not followed in his ways; they perverted justice for monetary gain. Partly because of Samuel's sons, the Israelites desired a king that they might be like the other nations. Samuel was displeased with the people, but the LORD told him the people were rejecting Him not Samuel. Samuel tried to warn the people of the potential problems a king would bring, but, based upon the people's persistence and the LORD'S permission, he relented.

God revealed to Samuel, one day before Saul came to the city, that on the next day the king would arrive. Samuel, believing that Saul would always continue his humility and dependence upon God, prepared Saul for the task before him. Samuel called the people together at Mizpah and reminded them of the words of the LORD from Deuteronomy 17:14-20 regarding a king. Thus began Samuel's relationship with Saul.

At first Saul was a good king. In time he would disobey God. Because of Saul's disobedience, Samuel would renounce him. Saul, on one occasion, offered the sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel and, on another occasion, failed to follow God's command through the prophet Samuel to utterly destroy the Amalekites (including their livestock). Instead, Saul spared King Agag and the best of the cattle. Saul tried to justify his actions, but Samuel rebuked him and told him that since he had rejected God, God had rejected him as king (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Saul remained king until his death, but his remaining years

were maddening for him. In his final encounter with a dead Samuel, Saul again was told that God had rejected him as king and that the Israelites would be delivered into the hands of the Philistines (the witch at En-dor. 1 Samuel 28).

God had continued to be with Samuel because Samuel had been faithful to God. His faithfulness allowed him to stand before the people and encourage them to point out where he had been wrong; of course, they could find nothing of fault in the great prophet of God. In contrast, God was no longer with Saul because of his disobedience.

Samuel and David

In 1 Samuel sixteen Samuel was grieving over the rejection of Saul when the LORD called to him and revealed He has a need for Samuel to anoint a new king of Israel from the sons of Jesse. After the LORD assured Samuel, Samuel did what the LORD commanded. Samuel believed the next king of Israel would be Jesse's son Eliab (based upon his outward appearance). God told Samuel that He does not look on the outward appearance, but upon the heart. Seven sons of Jesse passed before Samuel but none were God's chosen. Samuel sent for Jesse's youngest son, David. When he appeared, the LORD revealed that David was His anointed. Samuel anointed David, and the text notes that the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward.

Conclusion

In the Hebrew text ten words are used in connection with the death of Samuel. While Saul was chasing David, Samuel's life expired. The people gathered and buried him at his home in Ramah. The LORD was with Samuel till the end of his days. As Hester says so well, "By his unimpeachable integrity, his unwavering loyalty to Jehovah, his wise counsel and sound judgment, he had made a contribution to his nation which few have surpassed" (p.174).

HANNAH

Brenna Board

1 Samuel 1 & 2

Husband and wife, Elkanah and Hannah, longed to have children but Hannah was unable to conceive. Perhaps due to Hannah's infertility Elkanah decided to gain an additional wife, Peninnah. Peninnah bore many children to Elkanah. This made Hannah very sad. Elkanah tried to comfort her by paying her special attention, but this did not mend her grieving spirit.

On an annual visit to the temple in Shiloh Hannah vowed a vow to the Lord. She vowed that if the Lord blessed her with a son that she would give him back to the Lord all the days of his life. In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son and named him Samuel, which in the Hebrew means heard of God.

From just a simple reading of the first two chapters of the first book of Samuel we can learn so many lessons from Hannah's example. As we study Hannah, we also learn the reasons why Samuel grew to be such a great man in the service of God. As mothers, if we strive to follow Hannah's example, we, too, might have children that please God.

I. HANNAH'S EXAMPLE OF FAITH

A. Her faith never wavered.

1. Even in her sadness, year after year she went to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord.
2. How many of us miss our worship services for even unimportant excuses?
3. We can learn through Hannah if you stay strong and always trust in the Lord - He will provide (Matt. 6:33).

B. By giving Samuel back to the Lord she trusted the Lord fully to take care of her son.

1. As mothers it is very difficult to trust just about anyone with our children, especially that young.
2. Hannah truly showed her faith by not trying to back out of her vow.

II. HANNAH'S EXAMPLE OF PARENTHOOD

A. She truly taught unselfishness.

1. She was willing to give up her only child to the Lord. She was probably unaware that she would even be able to conceive again.

B. By this she taught how important a vow is Ecc. 5:5.

1. She made a vow to the Lord and she kept it. 1:24-28
2. How often do we promise God something and then don't follow through?

C. Hannah's prayerful example

1. Hannah prayed with persistence 1:12; with all her soul 1:15-16; and with faith in God's promise 1:18.
2. Faith is such an essential part of prayer.

3. Sometimes it might be hard to trust. Nobody knows God's timing or His purposes. We must try to be patient for His answers.
4. She prayed for Samuel. Do we pray for our children?

D. Hannah looked upon motherhood as a privilege.

1. She considered Samuel a blessing. 1 Sam. 1:10-11
2. Some women want children but do not want to be bothered by having to mother those children.
3. So many mothers do look upon motherhood as a privilege but take the privilege for granted by neglecting the spiritual training of the children.
4. Psalms 127:3

E. She gave her child to the Lord. 1:28

1. How many of us today instead of giving our children to the Lord, give them to the world?
 - a. Babysitters
 - b. Sports/extracurricular
 - c. Friends influencing them more than we do
2. We should count ourselves lucky that we do not have to physically give up our children - so much that we would honor the Lord by raising

them to be diligent Christians.

III. PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF HANNAH

A. God's plan for marriage is best.

1. Hannah suffered because of Elkanah's decision to have more than one wife.
2. Many Christians may not have multiple wives or cheat on their wives but may not follow God's plan for marriage (Eph. 5:22-*ff*).

B. Prayer Eases the burden

1. I Sam. 1:18
2. James 5:13
3. Let Go and Let God.

C. Baby dedication is more than a ceremony; it is a lifelong dedication.

1. Hannah showed she was willing to dedicate Samuel's entire life to the Lord by keeping her vow.
2. As our children grow the hope of raising faithful Christians should not diminish.

3. Deut. 6:4-ff

D. The importance of Godly mothers

1. If it hadn't been for Hannah what would have become of Samuel?
2. Samuel became one of the greatest Godly leaders of Israel.
3. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

E. Don't forget God after you receive your blessings.

1. How many of us have a prayer of thankfulness after our prayers have been answered?
2. 1 Samuel 2:1-10

F. Little things can mean a lot.

1. Hannah took Samuel a garment every year when she went to the temple.
2. We should teach our children not to take the little things in life for granted.

OBTAINING THE DOUBLE PORTION LIKE ELIJAH

Robert Jennings, II

2 Kings 2:1-14

This passage records the going home of one of the greatest men in the word of God. Elijah was a great tool for the Lord in his generation, but that service was to end. With his work quickly coming to a close, it was time for him to pass the baton to his successor. Our text tells us about a young man named Elisha. Elisha was unique in that he was hungry for all God offered him. He wanted to serve and was willing to do what was necessary to walk the walk that was before him.

In his desire to be a true servant of God, Elisha requested a double portion of the spirit of his mentor, Elijah. What we learn here from him is valuable in our own lives as well. Just as in the case of Elisha, the “mantle” of service in these days rests upon you and me. Recognizing this, we should want to be as effective in our work and ministry as possible.

I. ELISHA MADE A SPIRITUAL REQUEST (9-10)

A. **The Content Of His Request** (9) - Elisha asked to receive a double portion of Elijah’s spirit! The request was not for twice the power that had rested on Elijah. The request was to be recognized as Elijah’s replacement. Of course, he had already been selected by God for that position - **1 Kings 19:16**. It was common for firstborn male children to receive a double portion of their father’s estate. This was mandated by the Law, **Deut. 21:17**. (**Note:** He called Elijah “*my father*” in **verse 12**.) Elisha was asking for the right of the firstborn! He was asking that the same Spirit that had empowered the ministry of this great man of God be given to him as well. For what kind of spirit was he asking?

1. **A Spirit Of Faith** - Elijah learned to trust in the presence and power of God in this world. He knew that God was in absolute control of every situation. He walked by faith!

2. **A Spirit Of Obedience** - Elijah instantly and without question, even when the commands of God made no sense at all, went and did as God commanded.

3. **A Spirit Of Courage** - His faith in God and his obedience to God combined to give him the courage to stand for God, even when others ran away.

- a. He merely wanted to take over where Elijah had left off.
- b. He wanted to be the next prophet to Israel!

B. **The Character Of His Request** (10) - Elisha was told that he had asked a “**hard thing**”. It was beyond the power of Elijah to grant such a request. Only God could raise up prophets and give positions of power and influence. On the surface, Elisha’s request may seem a little selfish. It seems as though he was asking for twice the power and twice the glory, etc. In truth, his request is most humble in nature. Elisha knew that Israel still needed a man of God to deliver the word of God and do the work of God. He also knew that if he was to be that man, then he needed power that he did not possess. He needed the power of God working in him and through him if he was to accomplish this service.

C. **The Condition Of His Request** (10) - Elijah told Elisha that if he was with him until he was taken out of this world, then he would have the thing for which he is asking. The idea here is that this blessing could be his, but Elisha must remain faithful unto the end. It would have been far easier for Elisha to have stayed in one of the towns they passed through, but had he dropped out along the way, he would never have received the blessing he desired and desperately needed!

1. If there was ever a day when we needed people with a heart like Elisha’s, it is the day in which we live!
2. For far too long, the church has tried to operate in the machinery of human wisdom and power. (James 1:5-6; 3:13-18)
3. As a result, we have lost the power of God, because we have forsaken the Word of God, that made us the church that was turning the world upside down.
2. This kind of blessing and power does not come upon the uncommitted! It is reserved for those who will pay the price.
3. We need that same spirit of faith, obedience, and courage that rested on Elijah to be placed within us! (James 5:17-20)

II. ELISHA MANIFESTED A STEADFAST RESOLVE (1-8)

From the time it became apparent that Elijah was leaving until the moment he left and Elisha received the blessing, several trials crossed his way that attempted to hinder them. However, Elisha remained focused on obtaining the double portion.

- A. **Opposition Did Not Shake His Resolve** (3-5) - At every turn the sons of the prophets asked Elisha the same question, “***Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from over you to day?***” This question is literally this: “***The Lord is through with him and is calling him to heaven today. You would be better off to stay with us, or to strike out on your own.***” They tried to talk him out of his resolve! (If you decide that you are going after God until you obtain the double portion, you better look out! All around you there will be people who will do their best to talk you out of it! ***Wholehearted commitment to the cause of Christ leaves many people baffled!*** (Ill. Joseph - **Gen. 37-39**; Ill. 3 Hebrews - **Dan. 3**; Ill. Daniel - **Dan. 6**; Ill. Paul - **Acts 26:24**; Ill. Jesus - **John 7**. Don't let that crowd shake you; run with God!)
- B. **Opportunities Did Not Shake His Resolve** (1-6) - Every time they passed through a city, Elijah even attempted to get Elisha to stay. This wasn't an effort on his part to hinder Elisha's progress; it was designed to test his resolve. Of course, each of the places mentioned held a special place in the heart of the Jew and would have made a pleasant stopping place. These were opportunities for Elisha to stop and to settle in.
1. **Gilgal** - ***The place of beginnings*** - It was here that the Israelites first celebrated the Passover in the promised land. Here the males born during the wilderness wanderings were circumcised and the covenant was renewed, **Josh. 5**.
 2. **Bethel** - ***The place of dreams*** - It was here that Jacob met God and dreamed of angels descending and ascending out of heaven, **Gen. 28**.
 3. **Jericho** - ***The place of past victories*** - It was here that Israel had its first military victory in the promised land. **Josh. 6**. Jericho was also a border town. To pass beyond this location was to enter wild, new territory.
 4. **Jordan** - ***The place of death*** - That river represented the boundary for the Promised Land. To cross it meant to enter into

death. It was a formidable barrier that few would ever want to cross.

“We too find ourselves at these same places in our walk with the Lord. Far too many believers spend their entire Christian lives at Gilgal. They never grow and they never leave the place of beginnings. Some go as far as Bethel. They catch the vision of God’s great work which must be done. They see the needs, they feel the tug, but they never get past the place of dreaming about what they might do. They never take the next step of making those dreams and visions realities. Still others hold onto their ‘Jericho’s.’ They live in the victories of yesterday. They remember what happened back there, forgetting that the same God Who blessed then is desiring to bless now. Then some come to Jordan. This is the barrier between the self-life and the Spirit-life. Few ever take that final step of faith and sell out to go with God all the way. Notice that of all the prophets, only Elisha had enough faith to cross the river and go with Elijah, and it was Elisha who received the double portion. Don’t allow the opportunities to settle down along the way to hinder your progress, but by faith, proceed with God and watch Him remove the barriers.”

B. **Obstacles Did Not Shake His Resolve** (1-6) – To some, Elijah even appeared to be an obstacle to Elisha’s progress. After all, he tried 3 times to get Elisha to stay behind. The Jordan also stood as a barrier between Elisha and his receiving what he desired. Still he went on! He resolved in his heart to stay with Elijah until he was taken away. Even the Jordan was no obstacle to this man’s faith. After all, if Elijah was going to pass over Jordan, then so was Elisha. Whatever means his master used would be the means he, himself would use to cross the stream.

1. When you resolve to go with God, be forewarned that obstacles will cross your path. Remember when they do that they are there because God has permitted them in your life, **Rom. 8:28**. If God has put a resolve within your heart to go with Him, then let nothing short of death keep you from going with Him!

III. **ELISHA MANAGED A SOVEREIGN RESPONSE** (11-14)

Because he would not be deterred short of victory, Elisha got to partake in some wonderful, supernatural events.

A. **Elisha Watched Elijah’s Miracle** (11) Because he remained with Elijah, Elisha got to see the man of God taken up into Heaven alive.

- B. **Elisha Wore Elijah's Mantle** (12) - Because he stayed by the man of God, he was given Elijah's mantle. This sheep skin garment was the tangible sign that Elijah's ministry had been handed down to Elisha. In other words, because he refused to be waylaid, distracted, or sidetracked, Elisha got exactly what he asked for. He inherited the ministry of his master.
1. Those who pay the price to stay with the Lord and to go with Him through every difficulty and obstacle will see Him do the unexplainable time and again.
 2. Those who choose the easy route never get to see God's best.
 3. Those who go the extra mile get to see the remarkable.
- C. **Elisha Walked With Elijah's Master** (13-15) - When Elisha returned to the banks of Jordan, he knew that the mantle and the ministry of Elijah had passed to him. Now, he, in faith, calls on the same God Who had worked through Elijah to work through him. He calls upon the God Who: Answers by fire! Stops and starts the rain! Feeds His servants by the ravens! Multiplies the meal and the oil! Raises the dead! Is powerful enough to shake the mountains with the wind and to rend them with the earthquake! And speaks to His children in a still small voice! That is the God Elisha was calling upon, and he got the answer he was seeking. Just as they had for Elijah, the muddy, rushing waters of Jordan parted for Elisha! He had obtained the double portion!

Works Consulted

The previous outline is not original. It includes several works on this man of God. Some of these works include:

Who's Who in the Bible (Reader's Digest).

Journey's Through The Bible (R.B. Sweet).

Burton Coffman Commentaries (James Burton Coffman).

Many others.

ANDREW, A PROFILE OF A PERSONAL EVANGELIST

Nicholas Deiger

Who was Andrew? There are many Bible characters of whom we know more about than Andrew because there is more written about them. Sometimes in our lives we feel unimportant because we are not able to do things that others do. Yet, the “big” thing does not make us “big” in the sight of God. God did not expect us all to be elders, deacons, preachers, Bible class teachers; but what He does expect is for each of us to do our best.

As Jesus began His public ministry, He chose twelve men to carry on the work after His death and ascension back into heaven. Andrew was one of these twelve men chosen.

As we think about Andrew, there are some things about him that will encourage each one of us.

Andrew was an ordinary man

He never wrote a book that we know of. He was not one who was in the forefront like Peter, James, and John, or even Paul for that matter. So, what was Andrew’s most noble asset? Simply introducing others to Jesus. John 1:41,42. He found his brother Simon (Peter) and brought him to Jesus. In John 6:5-9, it was Andrew that brought the boy who had five barley loaves and two small fish, so that Jesus could feed the five thousand. Again, in John 12:20-22, it was Andrew, along with Philip, who brought the Greeks, “Who would see Jesus,” to Him.

Just think of the ordinary people, using what they have in great works - Andrew, Philip, Eunice, Lois, Dorcas, and a host of others. There is a place for you in God’s service.

He was a man of zeal

When he met the Savior his first desire was to find his brother Peter and bring him to Jesus. Andrew had great news, “We have found the Messiah.” He could not contain himself and not tell others about this great message. Notice he only brought Peter to Jesus.

We, too, need to be bringing others to learn about Jesus. We have this same great “news” that we have found the Savior, and we want others to have that same great feeling of salvation.

He was a great man of faith

When Andrew saw Jesus, he was convinced that he had found the Messiah. This implies that he had an open mind - that he was searching for the Messiah. He was already a follower of John. And, it also implies that he had a desire to know more about Jesus.

The only way we, too, can be people of great faith is to have an open mind to the "Words of Jesus." For they will judge us in the last day.

He was a man of outstanding humility

As we have pointed out, Andrew introduced his brother Peter to Jesus. Peter is far better known than was Andrew.

- It was Peter who answered the question of Jesus in Matthew 16:15. "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"
- It was Peter who went up on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, James, and John.
- Peter's sermon is recorded in Acts 2.

How do you think that Andrew felt about this? Andrew understood what he could and what he could not do in the service to the Lord. Because of his humble spirit, he accepted the plan that God had for him. (James 4:6)

Andrew is a great example for us today to use our talents that we are given no matter how small or great they may be. Always remember that with the proper attitude the "small" thing one does is just as important as the "big" things. Think of what Jesus said about the widow's mite. Mark 12:41-44, "Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.'"

Too many times we want to look at some great thing someone has done and forget about the little things. I heard on the news the other day of a man who bet his brother that he could not save one million pennies. Well, the brother did. A penny seems like a worthless effort, but one million pennies is ten thousand dollars.

Bringing someone to Jesus can lead to a million souls before the Day of Judgment. We might not be a Peter, James, or John, but we can be an Andrew.

JOHN—AN AUTHOR AND EXAMPLE OF FAITH AND FAITHFULNESS

Peter Ray Cole

John, the apostle, was a prolific writer of the New Testament, second only to Paul in the number of books written. The author of the Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation, he proclaims a message of faith and faithfulness, which are central themes of his writings. In addition to his written exhortations of faith and faithfulness, the record of John's life exhibits these traits.

John—An Author and Example of Faith

John was one of the first to answer Jesus' call to apostleship. Beginning his life of faithfulness without hesitation, John and his brother "immediately" took leave from mending their nets, left their ship and their father and followed Jesus (Matthew 4:21-22). By faith, they left their family, their livelihood, and the life they knew for the uncertainties of discipleship. Uncertain, but not blind, the faith of John had most likely begun taking shape during his discipleship of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus.

In Mark 3:17, John and his brother, James, were called the "Sons of Thunder" by Jesus; John is remembered, however, as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Boanerges, literally interpreted "sons of thunder", leads one to believe that Jesus saw in John and James the traits of courage and strength. Guy N. Woods writes in *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*:

He was a 'son of thunder' in teaching the truth, in opposing error, in challenging the enemies of the Lord—qualities and characteristics the Lord approved and appreciated. John was the disciple Jesus loved because he *was* Boanerges, not in spite of it!¹

The special relationship between Jesus and John is exhibited perhaps the most clearly in the words Jesus spoke on the cross: "Woman, behold your son" and, to John, "Behold your mother" (John 19:26-27). Before Jesus' death on the cross, however, we see that John was one of the apostles who stayed closest to Jesus throughout His ministry. This is no doubt due in part to his strong faith and dedication to the ministry of Christ. It was John, along with his brother, James, and Peter who were chosen to be witnesses of the

¹ Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*. Nashville: The Gospel Advocate Company, 1989, page 14.

transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). The same three apostles were often the only ones to be with Jesus as he performed miracles, such as raising the daughter of Jairus in Mark 5:37. John, again with Peter and James, was also with Jesus as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-34).

He was beside the Lord during the Last Supper and had “leaned on His breast at the supper” (John 13:23; 21:20). John was the only apostle at the cross during Jesus’ death, and it was to him that Jesus entrusted the care of His mother, Mary (John 19:26-27). John wrote specifically of his first-hand witness of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, saying: “And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe” (John 19:35). John and Peter were the first to hear of the empty tomb from Mary Magdalene, with John outrunning Peter and arriving at the tomb first (John 20:1-8). Verse 8 states that “he saw and believed.” In John 21, it is “that disciple whom Jesus loved” who recognized and declared the risen Lord to Peter when Jesus appeared to them again by the Sea of Tiberias (verse 7). It is the same apostle who concluded his Gospel account as a first-hand witness of Jesus’ life and ministry by saying: “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

The account of John supplements and compliments the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as biographies of Jesus Christ, focusing on His life and teachings. As Christians today and throughout the ages, the Gospels have been fundamental to the development of our faith in Jesus as the Son of God. John began his account before creation, reminding readers of both the divinity and humanity of the Word, who was in the beginning and made all things (1:1-3), and was made flesh and dwelt among us (1:14). By coming to earth, Jesus gave those who received him “power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (1:12 KJV).

John pens the beautiful words spoken by Jesus of God’s love and grace and man’s opportunity and responsibility in one of the most quoted and beloved verses of the New Testament: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (3:16). The reassurance of the reward of true faith is echoed throughout the book, coupled with the threat of destruction that results from unbelief: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (3:36).

In the Gospel According to John, John is a faith builder. In one of the key passages of this book, John writes: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:30-31).

As faith is requisite to salvation, so it is to Christian growth, development, and a life of faithful service in God's kingdom. A solid foundation of faith is essential to ensuring faithfulness. The Gospel of John lays a foundation of faith; his subsequent writings encourage and demand faithfulness of the readers.

John—An Author and Example of Faithfulness

If the Gospel of John gives us the tools necessary to build our faith, I John, II John, III John, and Revelation certainly give us the admonitions and encouragements to maintain it. John's continued example of faithfulness serves as a clear reminder that being faithful until death (Revelation 2:10) is the ultimate goal of a Christian as he pens his vision in the book of Revelation during his exile on Patmos. Historically, John is the only apostle, other than Judas Iscariot, not to die as a martyr for the cause of Christ. His longevity, however, in years on earth and years of service to the cause of Christ speak of his faithfulness.

In I John, John writes for four main reasons: (1) "that your joy may be full" (1:4); (2) "that you may not sin" (2:1) (3) "that you may know that you have eternal life" (5:13a); and (4) "that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (5:13b). In summation, John writes to encourage faithfulness. The fellowship that he speaks of in chapter 1 and verse 7 is contingent on faithfulness, or, in other words, walking in the light. As Christians, our line of fellowship with God is hindered only by our own lack of faithfulness. It is not God who moves away from us, but we who move away from God.

John encourages the recipients of his first epistle, specifically, by telling them why he is writing to them: (1) because their sins have been forgiven; (2) because they have known "Him who is from the beginning"; (3) because they have overcome the wicked one; (4) because they have known the Father; (5) because of their strength through the Word of God (I John 2:12-14). In the text immediately following this genuine commendation, John admonishes: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

From the beginning of this epistle, John reminds his readers again of "that which was from the beginning", reassures his witness and testimony, and, essentially, revives faith in the Word (1:1). In his conclusion, John encourages faithfulness with one more warning: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (5:21). This serves as a reminder for us today to keep ourselves from "idols" we tend to create through our love of the world and the things in the world.

In II John, John refers to himself as the elder. Fulfilling the duty of an elder, he promotes purity in the church. John reminds the readers that "many

deceivers have gone out into the world” (v. 7) and encourages them—and us—to “look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward” (v. 8). Transgressing and leaving the doctrine of Christ is serious and destructive, as is receiving and encouraging those who do not bring with them the doctrine of Christ (v. 9-11). Again, John heartens faithfulness in this exhortation: “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it” (v. 6).

In the third epistle, John’s love for the truth and his sincere concern for the saints is evidenced in this passage: “For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (v. 3-4). Concerns of their faithfulness pervade III John. John writes specific commendation of Gaius (v. 1-8) and Demetrius (v. 11-12). On the other hand, he writes specific condemnation of Diotrephes for his sins, which John wrote that he would remember when he could personally come to them (v. 9-10).

Finally, in John’s last book of the New Testament, Revelation, he records the words which Christians recite often: “Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life” (2:10b). This is an outstanding encouragement of faithfulness and perseverance. John, himself, had endured persecution similar to what he wrote about in Revelation (Acts 4:3; 5:17-42). Because of his faithfulness, he was regarded as one of the “pillars” in the early church (Galatians 2:9).

John faithfully, through inspiration, relates the letters to the seven churches of Asia, some of which encourage, but most of which reprimand their unfaithfulness. Of the seven churches, only two were truly faithful, Smyrna and Philadelphia. In the letter to Philadelphia, John records: “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (3:8). In the rebuke of Sardis, for example, John records the blunt judgment: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (3:1)—along with the encouragement of repentance: “Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent” (3:3).

In the theme of the eternal reward of the faithful that is throughout the book of Revelation, John pens these beautiful words of comfort: “They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes” (7:16-17). John reminds us throughout this final book that we can overcome, we can remain faithful, and we can inherit eternal life.

I AM THE LIFE

David R. Powell

John 14:6

Objective: We gain life by losing it.

Introduction:

1. Man has always pursued the quest for the meaning of life--what's it all about?

A father went into a supplicated toy store to buy a gift for his son. The salesperson directed his attention to a new and unusual toy. The toy came unassembled in a box. The salesperson explained that no matter how hard the child tried, he would not be able to fit the pieces together. The manufacturer's design for this toy was to teach children to deal with real life.

For the non-Christian this illustrates the frustration encountered in life. Without Christ, life is one complicated puzzle without a solution. Living without Christ is like sowing without a needle, riding a bike without a chain; it is working without a reward.

2. Jesus said: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly (Jn 10:10)."
3. The word "life" is a key word in the book of John--occurs 47 times (NKJV).
4. It is difficult to imagine anyone not interested in this subject - life!

In a *Peanuts* comic strip Charlie Brown and Lucy were having a discussion. Lucy stated that life was like a chair on the deck of a ship. She explained: some place the chair forward so they can see where they are headed, others place it backward so they can see where they have been; and some place it sideways so they can see where they are presently. As Lucy was being so philosophical, Charley Brown replied: "I can't even get my chair unfolded."

5. As we view this subject, let us consider...
 - a. Man's *search* for meaning in life.
 - b. The *source* of meaning in life.
 - c. The *surrender* necessary for obtaining life's meaning.

Body:

I. THE SEARCH

A. *Existentialism.*

1. *Defined:* Existentialism is a term that emphasizes the existence of the human being, the lack of meaning and purpose in life, and the solitude of human existence.
2. *Described:* Existentialists must view life as a void (emptiness).
3. *Development:* It was during the Second World War, when Europe found itself in a crisis and faced with death and destruction, that the existentialist movement began to flourish, in the mid-20th century.¹
4. *Dilemma:* Existentialism does not answer the question, "Why am I here?"

B. *Ecclesiastes* deals with man's search for meaning.

1. One of the key frustrations among existentialists is boredom.

¹ The New Nation, March 7 and 21, 1986.

- a. Solomon suffered with the existential vacuum producing boredom.
 - b. In Ecclesiastes chapter one Solomon views life as one monotonous repetition, as a merry-go-round illustrated by the life cycle; the sun rising in the east and setting in the west - day, after day, after day; and that of the water cycle.
 - c. He was living in a rut and very unhappy by his mundane existence.
2. He experimented in the laboratory of pleasure, power, possessions - summing it up as vanities of vanities, like grasping the wind.
 3. Solomon's life is summed up in Ecclesiastes chapter one as mundane, meaningless, and miserable.
- C. *Evidence of the existential vacuum in America.*
1. Viktor E. Frankl, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, records ...
 - a. That among his American students, 60% suffer with the existential vacuum.

- b. Frankl concludes that depression, aggression, and addiction are complications associated with existentialism.
2. *The National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* reports that in 1992 suicide was the 9th cause of death.
 - There were a total of 29,760 suicides in the U.S. in 1992.
 - 22,050 of these were white males.
 - 4,930 were white females.
 - 2,000 blacks committed suicide in 1992.
3. Between the time of birth and death, many Americans are not finding any real meaning in life.
 - a. Americans need the good news of the Gospel.
 - b. Jesus says: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." - Jn 10:10b.

II. THE SOURCE: Jesus Christ is The Source of All Life.

- A. Only in Jesus can we experience real meaning in life.
 1. The book of Colossians addresses the issue at hand with clarity.
 - a. Paul warns of the danger of philosophies: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to

the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” - Col 2:8.

- b. Two verses later Paul tells his readers that they are “complete in Him (Christ).” - Col 2:10.

2. Sigmund Freud:

Only religion is able to answer the question of the purpose of life. One can hardly go wrong in concluding that the idea of a purpose in life stands and falls with the religious system.²

- B. Jesus not only brings life, but He also is life: “I am the way, the truth, and the life...” - Jn 14:6.

- 1. “All things were made through Him .“ (Jesus brought everything into being) - Jn 1:3

- 2. Jesus brought a quality of life to the ...

- a. Nobleman’s son - Jn 4.
- b. Legs of the lame man - Jn 5.
- c. Blind man - Jn 9.

- 3. Jesus, as the "*resurrection and the life*," brought dead Lazarus back to life - Jn 11.

- C. John shares the *sequence* of Jesus coming into the world as the life.

- 1. He was with the Father in the beginning.
- 2. He came from Heaven to earth with this clearly stated

² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton. 1963), page 26.

mission: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” - Jn 10:10b.

3. He laid down His life that we might live.
4. We gain life through Jesus’ word: “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”
5. The book comes to a conclusion telling us that these things were “written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

III. THE SURRENDER: Ironically, To Gain Life, We Must Lose Our Life.

A. Living for self will never produce meaning in life.

1. Solomon, having learned of the vacuum associated with existentialism, stated - Eccl 12:13-14:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man’s all.
For God will bring every work into judgment,
Including every secret thing,
Whether good or evil.

2. Solomon learned that the quest for meaning is found only through sacrificial service.

B. Jesus clarified this principle - John 12:22-26.

But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. 24 Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. 25 He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."

- C. Viktor E. Frankl, in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, observed the following from his experience as a prisoner in German concentration camps:

The more one forgets himself - by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love - the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.³

Conclusion:

1. Man's greatest search is for meaning in life.
2. Jesus is the only answer to man's greatest problem--the problem of self and sin.
3. Jesus came to bring life--abundant life.
4. This life can only be achieved through the surrender of self
5. Apart from surrender the following would hold true of our lives.

Most men eddy about
 Here and there--eat and drink,
 Chatter and love and hate,
 Gather and squander, are raised
 Aloft, are hurl'd in the dust,
 Striving blindly, achieving
 Nothing; and then they die-
 - By Matthew Arnold

³ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Touchstone: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1984), page 115.

SOLOMON: GOD'S GREAT EXPERIMENT? "Life In The Fast Lane"

Melvin Salal Rogers

MYTHOLOGY: The Perception of Solomon

When the name of King Solomon is said, most remember three things about him: (1) his wealth – he was certainly one of the richest men ever according to the Biblical text, (2) his wisdom – no man was ever as wise as Solomon, (3) his women – Solomon housed 700 wives and 300 concubines – probably the largest harem known to history. Many believe that, in his old age, Solomon was led into idolatry by these same women. A more careful reading of the Biblical text (1 Kings 11:1-4) reveals that his heart was turned to other gods. A simple but important distinction must be made here. These false "gods" already existed and were being worshipped in Solomon's kingdom by his foreign wives, and only in old age did he join them in their idolatry. He, the king of God's people, had already allowed idol worship to taint Israel, and his "old-age-idolatry" was not the only sinful practice he participated in. The elements that caused the fall of Solomon are deeper than his polygamy and are rooted within the growing luxury of his court.¹ Solomon may dubiously be the most important man in history, and, through a limited study of his mythology, reality, and legacy, Solomon's experimentation with pleasure reveals a sinful man's excesses and God's sanctioning favor of a man who learned from his sinful practices and lived to preach against them.

Jesus said of Solomon, "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Luke 12:27). Christ was dealing with the Jewish perception of the reign of Solomon, a perception that has crossed cultural boundaries. Solomon's reputation is well established. First and foremost, he was a wise man.² At times, he seems a saint, and at other times a scoundrel. History has chosen to deal kindly with Solomon, maybe too kindly. Some choose to remember him as a man of wisdom, forgetting that he was a man of his age. He exhibited many of the worst features of life lived by an Oriental ruler over three millennia ago.³ Since he was born to the purple, both figuratively and literally, he belonged to the generation of Israel that found it quite natural to enjoy the advantages of his father's victories.⁴ A more careful examination of the biblical texts reveals certain ironies about Solomon that no mythology can erase.

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *History of Judah and Israel from the birth of Solomon to the reign of Ahab*. (Piccadilly London: The Religious Tract Society, 1880), 109.

² H. Gaubert. *Solomon the Magnificent*. (New York: Giniger Books, 1970), xiii.

³ Pfeiffer, Charles F. *Old Testament History*. (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1973).

⁴ Gaubert, 177-178

REALITY: The truth about Solomon

Solomon was committed to experiencing every pleasure conceivable to the mind of man to learn best what keeps a man happy (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11). To assure that the experiment has been carried out in a thorough manner, he assures the reader that he spared nothing and denied himself nothing.⁵ The only stipulation in his pursuit of pleasure was that it would not violate his wisdom.⁶ Solomon's wisdom was the asked-for gift from God, who liked the request so much that He gave Solomon riches, honor, and long life if he kept God's commandments (1 Kings 3:5-14). Some don't believe that this "wisdom" in any way resembles the essentially moral wisdom described by modern day philosophies. It supposedly meant something entirely different – a special ability in managing affairs in their political and administrative aspects.⁷ This contrasts sharply the biblical description of Solomon's wisdom, a wisdom that encompassed both moral and worldly knowledge, "a largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore." In no way was the intelligence of Solomon limited; yet, he foolishly chose to pursue worldly pleasures instead of keeping God's commandments and lost the conditional promise of long life.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon pictures himself as having fallen into many evils as he sought happiness through wealth, wine, mirth, servants, a large harem, vast holdings, and exquisite inventions.⁸ It is ironic to note that if it were possible for a wise man to use alcohol wisely and safely, Solomon would be the one who could do so;⁹ yet, he wrote the definitive verse on the evils of wine, a lesson he must have learned first hand (Proverbs 20:1). Solomon, with all his riches, gave himself completely over to the pursuit of pleasure, and there were many others besides the king involved in this search; yet, in the end, he rejected such pursuits.¹⁰ The empire became his slave, and the sole end of its toil was his pleasure.¹¹ This pleasure lasted only as long as the project was undertaken and its novelty had not yet worn off.¹²

The style of living at the palace grew more luxurious and expenses increased accordingly, until there was complete and shameless waste that put Solomon on the straight road to bankruptcy.¹³ Solomon carried out his program of expansion with large public works paid for by harshly taxing the twelve districts of his kingdom and accepting credit from building suppliers.¹⁴

⁵ H.C Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952), 64.

⁶ R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt. *Ecclesiastes*. (Joplin: College Press, 1988 [1977]), 52-53.

⁷ Gaubert, xvii.

⁸ Bob Winton. *Outline Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. (Gallipolis: Bob Winton, 1999), 1.

⁹ Winton, 11.

¹⁰ Ray Stedman. *Is this all there is to life? Answers from Ecclesiastes*. (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publications, 1999), 26-27.

¹¹ Albert Edward Bailey. *History of the Hebrew Commonwealth*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 128.

¹² Leupold, 65.

¹³ Gaubert, 152.

¹⁴ Bernhard W. Anderson. *Understanding the Old Testament*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1966), 157.

Solomon wanted to be remembered as the richest king ever and his shameless pursuit of wealth lost all restraint.¹⁵ He did whatever he needed to do to obtain the best treasures available in his known world. The burden which Solomon imposed on the people, (to support his women, their palaces, their servants, children, the acquisition of fine things of the ancient world, expansive building projects, and other requirements of Oriental kings), weighed very heavily on Israel. Frankly, the support of such a king and court must have proved draining on the resources of the nation.¹⁶ Undeniably, Solomon appears as a very poor man of business with his very foolish expenses and only modest revenue.¹⁷ It should not surprise anyone that the tribes of Israel asked Rehoboam to lighten the tax burdens that Solomon had selfishly placed on them over the time of his reign (1 Kings 12:4). Later generations imagined that Solomon must have been the richest man in the world, but they forget that he did not pay his bills, the people did.¹⁸

Even Solomon's treatment of women was reprehensible. From his marriage to his Egyptian Princess to the 300th concubine, Solomon sought to have the largest harem in his known world. Certainly, most of these women had been asked in marriage for political reason for it was in this way that political alliances between countries were made.¹⁹ Still, one must ask the question, "Why so many women? Why were seven hundred wives necessary for a man of God?" Clearly this was against the spiritual laws taught by Moses for all Israelites, especially the king (Deuteronomy 17:14-17). How difficult it must have been to even attempt to keep each of these women happy. Some might perversely think that such a harem kept Solomon happy, but, again, imagine the headaches taking care of a thousand women might cause one economically, socially, and psychologically. Frankly, such a harem is a waste of money and emotion just so that one could brag about its existence and size. When Solomon was old and less able to resist influences around him, he yielded so far to his foreign wives that he worshipped their false gods openly.²⁰ Obviously, such a harem of idol worshippers was not a proper thing for this wise man to accumulate.

LEGACY

In a sense, God performed an experiment with Solomon for the benefit of all men who will read and learn from his experiences.²¹ The purpose of this "controlled experiment" was to determine what the "good things" of life were. Looking back, when he had regained his spiritual perspective, Solomon could

¹⁵ Gaubert, 168.

¹⁶ Edersheim, 115-116.

¹⁷ Gaubert, 155.

¹⁸ Bailey, 135.

¹⁹ Gaubert, 165.

²⁰ Edersheim, 110-111.

²¹ Winton, 1.

say from experience that all of these efforts to obtain happiness through the gratification of lusts and pride were empty.²² Materialism was tried and found wanting as a source of genuine happiness.²³ One should not be unduly critical of Solomon, for his experiments were not hedonistic in nature.²⁴ He truly was trying to find happiness, but the path he chose was not very wise. His conclusions on such pursuits of pleasure show his understanding that all pleasure is not intrinsically good.

Solomon's forty years as king of Israel is best described as a reign of excesses. Admittedly, David had always been very lax with his children, and this indulgence of Solomon probably led to such excess. A careful father breeds a spendthrift son. David filled the coffers – Solomon emptied them. David worked to enrich the kingdom – Solomon encompassed its future ruin.²⁵ Lacking his father's moral capacity and political insight, Solomon did not see that a course of unbridled selfishness would alienate his subjects and be counter-productive to his own interests.²⁶ To Solomon belongs the doubtful honor of having set the Hebrew world a standard of regal magnificence, regal selfishness, and the perversion of great talents – facts that many historians fail to illuminate.²⁷ His quest to solve the meaning of life through the pursuit of pleasure revealed that a fulfilled life is impossible without God.

Even with all his wisdom, Solomon is an annoying and puzzling enigma of history that is not easily hidden. Although it is impossible not to like him, his actions must be condemned. Clearly, under Solomon, Israel became numerous, prosperous, and happy (1Kings 4:20-21). Because of the burdens brought on them in fulfilling his desires, Israel did not remain so. Jesus spoke very little about this great king of Israel, and, when he did, it was not exactly complimentary. He described the lilies of the field as dressed in more glory than Solomon for they did not toil for material things (Matthew 6:29). Jesus also made it clear that his wisdom was greater than Solomon's, so the Pharisees should have listened to him (Matthew 12:31). To deny the importance of Solomon in history is to deny the abundance of temporal blessings God can bestow on a king and a nation. To look with nostalgia on such a reign of excess as "all good" is a failure to accept the legacy of Solomon, that it was clearly not "all good" during his reign and that he had lost his way. Solomon, in the book of Ecclesiastes, admits his sin and the importance of following God – something he had failed to do for a large portion of his life, the portion that many historians find hard to reconcile with their belief in the greatness of his reign and his kingdom. Jesus said in Mark 8:36-37, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or

²² Winton, 11-13.

²³ John Waddey. *Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon: An Exposition*. (Abilene: Quality Publication, 1985), 16.

²⁴ Kidwell, 44.

²⁵ Gaubert, 178-179.

²⁶ Bailey, 123.

²⁷ Bailey, 138.

what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" The preacher, Solomon, directly answers that question after a life of sinful pleasure. Solomon clearly tried to gain the whole world, but he realized that his pursuit of women and riches were unprofitable toward God. In fact, such pursuits took him away from worshipping the true God. His "magnificent experiment" is a warning to man to live for God now and not live "life in the fast lane." God allowed Solomon to experience all this physical world has to offer and to record his inspired conclusions. "And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was not profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). As we know, Israel failed to heed his final warning, "Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

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“JOSHUA”

Andy Miller

As we have been looking at great people of the Bible during this lectureship, we will be looking at the person of Joshua this morning.

Joshua has a book all of his own in the Old Testament. It contains twenty-four chapters and was written between 1350 and 1410 B.C. The title came from the book's chief character; Joshua.

Joshua was almost stoned to death by his own people (Num. 14:6-10) nearly forty years before the book of Joshua begins ... because, out of twelve spies to Canaan, only he and Caleb determined to obey God's directions to conquer the land. Because of their unbelief to accept God's covenant, the children of Israel spent forty years in the wilderness. But now, Joshua, Moses' successor, is preparing to lead the Israelites from the wilderness into their conquest of the promise land.

“Moses my servant is dead” must have come as a shock to all Israel. A great leader has died; the loss weighs heavily on the hearts of a sorrowful nation, but the days of mourning are over; the thirty days of weeping have come to an end; and God's work must go forward (Deut. 34:8). We might say about Moses that a mighty oak has fallen and there is a great void in Israel. In Deut. 34:10, we are told, "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." Moses was truly great but not indispensable. God had already reared up a successor in the person of Joshua, who was filled with the spirit of wisdom and was ready to pick up the torch that Moses held so high so long.

Joshua was a great soldier of the Lord, and we need to use him as an example as we are soldiers for the Lord, also. He was a member of the tribe of Ephraim. We don't know about much of his early life in Egypt, but we do know he was a slave to Egypt, as were the rest of the children of Israel. His father was Nun of the tribe of Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:22-27), and his grandfather's name was Elishama, who was captain and head of the tribe of more than forty thousand people (Num. 1:10-2:18)

Joshua's name is a combination of “Hosea” (He will save) and “Jehoshua,” with Jehovah's name prefixed (“Jehovah by him would save Israel”). Thus, he becomes a type of Jesus, who will save and lead his people to the promised land in heaven.

As we continue to take a look at the life of Joshua, we can see that God was getting Joshua ready for leadership by making him a minister or servant of Moses for forty years in the wilderness.

His name is first mentioned in Exodus 17:8,9. This is when God's people were being attacked by the Amalekites. Moses had ordered Joshua to gather his men in a counter-attack against the enemy. While Moses, standing on top of the hill with the rod of God in his hand, lifted it up toward heaven, Israel prevailed. When Moses lowered the rod, Amalek prevailed. So, Aaron and Hur responded by standing on either side of Moses, holding up his hands. As a result, Israel won the victory. What a great lesson Joshua learned here early in his military career. You cannot win without asking for God's help. He also learned that you cannot be a success with your strength alone. The size of the army did not give him victory; his human ingenuity did not give him victory; and his military strategy did not give him victory. Without the Lord's fighting on his side Joshua's efforts would have all been in vain. The great apostle Paul lived a life of confidence and assurance, but he realized the source of his confidence and his faith when he wrote these words in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Joshua was a great spiritual leader in Israel; he was truly "a man of the book." Israel had a great need for a heroic military leader, but still greater was the need for a courageous spiritual leader. Joshua was the man to fill the void. He was a man of courage, a man of strength; one who was known for his obedience; one who did not turn to the right or left, a godly man who meditated on the law of the Lord both day and night and taught others the word of God. (Joshua 1:7-9)

Joshua is a great example for us as gospel preachers and teachers today and in the ages to come. Let us speak where the Bible speaks and be devoted to living and preaching the inspired word to a lost and dying world.

The mission that we really remember Joshua by is when he was a spy in the land of Canaan. He was one of twelve that were sent to survey the promise land at the command of God through Moses. They were to determine the number of inhabitants, the cities, and whether they were fortified, the extent of the land, the fertility of the soil, with some assessment of the effort that would be needed to conquer and dwell in the land. As the twelve spies returned with their report, they all agreed that it was a fruitful land, and that, "It flowed with milk and honey" (Numbers 13:26, 27). But, as to the conquest of the land, the majority report given by ten of the spies was very gloomy, fearful, and completely negative. They felt the enemies were too strong; the cities were fortified, they had seen some giants in the land which made them appear as grasshoppers in comparison. Therefore, they said, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we" (Numbers 13:31).

Remember what God had promised Israel, and what many of them had apparently forgotten, "I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." It says much about the character of Joshua and Caleb that they gave the minority report, filled with optimism, saying that the land was good, they were able to possess it, and God would bless them in their efforts. Joshua warned the people not to fear their enemies and rebel against God, but the people threatened to stone them, until the Lord intervened to save them.

Moses did as God commanded him and exhorted Joshua to be strong and of good courage and that God would bless him and enable him to lead Israel into the land of promise.

Moses also gave Joshua a song that he was to teach the children of Israel to sing. This song is found in Deuteronomy 32. It was a song that pictured the grace and mercy of God and spoke of abundant blessings bestowed upon the faithful; it also warned of the wrath of God that would be visited upon the sinful and idolatrous people who refused to serve God. Moses warned Joshua of Israel's future apostasy.

Joshua would now deal with many great challenges as he prepared to lead the children of Israel into the land of Canaan. However, Joshua placed his trust in One who would never fail him, or forsake him.

Joshua was confronted by a group of heathen nations bound together by treaties, a people living in heavily fortified cities, equipped with horses and chariots and weapons of war. The challenge was enormous; the outlook was gloomy, but Joshua had good success. As we know God was with him, as he was with Moses. Within six years, six nations were overthrown, thirty-one kings were slain; and Canaan began to be divided among the tribes as God had promised.

The book of Joshua has a unique place in God's scheme of redemption. First of all, we see that God promised to make a nation of Abraham's seed. (Genesis 12:2). Then in Genesis 12 and verse 7, God promised to make a nation of Abraham. God was not yet finished with Abraham for he promised the coming of the savior through Abraham (Genesis 12:3). The book of Joshua reveals how God fulfilled the land promise.

The book of Joshua can be divided into four sections:

1. Crossing the Jordan River (chapters 1-4),
2. The conquest of Canaan (chapters 5-12),
3. The settlement of the land (chapters 13-22),
4. The last days of Joshua (chapters 23-24).

As we begin our look at the book of Joshua, we will review the important historical events. We have already discussed Joshua's being chosen to take the place of Moses and that God promised to be with him. We also talked about his being a spy in the land of Canaan.

Joshua was now ready to lead the children across the Jordan River (Joshua 3&4). It was the time of harvest and the Jordan River was at flood stage. Joshua told the priests who were carrying the ark of the covenant to come and stand in the water of the Jordan River. When the feet of the priests were in the water, the waters rose up in a heap a great distance upstream and Israel crossed over on dry ground.

Joshua, seeing the success of the crossing, picked up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan river to set up a memorial for the children of Israel to remember the crossing of the river.

Then we move on to Joshua chapter six. Here we see the great battle of Jericho. God gave the city to Israel, but they had to comply with his instructions to receive it. This was the strangest bit of military strategy ever recorded in history of military conflict. What process of attacking and destroying a city was ever accomplished by marching around the walls, blowing trumpets, and shouting a great shout? Based upon human wisdom, what commander would have directed such an assault? It would take a man of faith, such as Joshua to obey God's command in the absence of any human wisdom. Joshua exemplifies what is meant by obedient faith. If Joshua would not have done exactly as God had said, there would not have been a victory. (Hebrews 11:30) "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about for seven days."

As we move on to Joshua chapter seven, we see sin in the camp of Israel. God had said not to take of any of the spoils of war from Jericho, but the temptation was too great for Achan and his family. As a result of the sin of Achan, the children of Israel were defeated at Ai (Joshua 7:5). Achan finally confessed and was stoned. As soon as the sin had been removed Ai, was easily defeated by Israel.

As we move on through the book of Joshua, we come to chapter ten where we see the day that the sun stood still. Joshua is winning a great battle but needs a little more time. The enemy is fleeing from the field of battle, so Joshua directs his plea to God for the sun to stand still over Gibeon and the moon to stand still over the valley of Ajalon. We are told in Joshua 10:13-14 that his request was granted by the Lord.

In rapid succession one nation after another fell before the army of Israel, and Joshua's fame as a military hero brought fear to the hearts of

heathen kings. God blessed Joshua's efforts with success because he remained faithful to his God.

Now that we are moving close to the end of the book of Joshua, we see his farewell address. For the second time Joshua calls for a national assembly of Israel in the valley of decision (Joshua 24:1). This is a far greater assembly than that after the victory over Ai in Joshua chapter eight. Some estimate a million people were assembled in the valley to rededicate their lives and renew their commitment to God and his law.

In chapter twenty-four, we see Joshua's charge and the people's choice. In view of all the blessings that God bestowed upon the nation, of which Joshua has reminded them, and which they knew in their hearts were true, they were willing to renew their sacred covenant with Jehovah.

Joshua now issued a solemn charge and his serious challenge to this great assembly. In Joshua 24:14-15, Joshua said,

"Now therefore fear the lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell. But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

Joshua had called for an immediate decision. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." The response of the people, no doubt, was thrilling to their old and faithful leader:

"And the people said unto Joshua, nay: but we will serve the Lord" vs 21, and then in vs. 24, "and the people said unto Joshua, the Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey."

The covenant was confirmed and recorded, and Joshua took a great stone and set it up under an oak, as a witness in all Israel lest they should forget the Lord or the great events of that day.

Joshua died at the age of 110, and, as a fitting tribute to his memory, it is said that, "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel" (Joshua 24:31).

RUTH: A GREAT WOMAN OF THE BIBLE

Stephanie Miller

This morning we will be looking at Ruth, a great woman of the Bible. The story of Ruth is one of the most beloved stories of Bible women. It is a story of love and Ruth's rare combination of beauty, goodness, and gentleness, and of her heartwarming devotion and faithfulness to both God and her family.

In our short time together, we will look at the four chapters of the book of Ruth and a brief overview of each and try to make some practical applications as well.

In chapter one, Ruth makes a noble choice: "I will go." We know that Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons fled to Moab, due to famine. There, Elimelech dies and Naomi's sons marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Several years later, the sons died leaving three widows trying to care for themselves. Naomi decided to return to her homeland of Bethlehem, and Ruth and Orpah decided to begin the journey with her. Naomi entreated her daughter-in-laws to return to their homeland of Moab. Orpah chose to return to Moab; but Ruth, leaving her family and a false religion for the true God and family, made her noble choice to go with Naomi and to stay with her until death. Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem and prepared to live with the choices they had made.

There are times when every woman stands at the crossroads and makes one decision that can determine the entire course of life. Look back into your own life, and you will see that this is true. It may be a decision to move (as Lot, Gen. 13:11-13), or to marry (as Solomon, 1 Kings 11: 4-10), or to reject the Gospel (as Felix, Acts 24:25). These stood at the crossroads and took the wrong turn. A different decision could have altered their destiny. When Ruth turned from idols to the living God and set her face toward Bethlehem, she made a decision which determined not only the remainder of her earthly life but her eternal life as well. The opposite course of action would have led her back to a life of idolatry, as it did Orpah.

Life is a series of decisions, and we should weigh carefully the choices which we make that have eternal consequences. This is one thing that makes youth such a precious time of life. So many decisions are so far-reaching: friendships, education, marriage, companionship, and careers. These are a few of life's crossroads, and wise is the one who makes every effort to visualize the end of the road before entering it. Ruth made a decision to obey God. For many this often means leaving behind dear things such as family and friends. There is no indication that Ruth ever looked back after making her decision.

So must it be with those who become Christians, a willingness to give up everything, if necessary, to obtain the one pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45,46), and, again, visualize the end of the road before entering it.

The second chapter of Ruth is about Ruth's lowly service: "Let Me Glean." Ruth requested permission from Naomi to go and glean in the fields so as to provide food for her and her aging mother-in-law and, also, to exercise her right as a widow to glean after the reaper during the harvest and hoping to find favor or kindness from a landowner.

The law at this time, as stated in Deut. 24:19-20, provided that, at the harvest, the poor or widowed could pick what the reapers had missed or dropped. In doing this, Ruth met Boaz, and he inquired about Ruth. Upon learning of Ruth's identity and relationship to Naomi, Boaz extended kindness to Ruth, by letting her glean alone in his field and ordering the young men not to touch her. Ruth is comforted by the kindness of Boaz and hoped to continue to find favor in his sight. Ruth told Naomi of Boaz, and Naomi showed her approval and encouraged her to continue to work for Boaz - which she does until the end of the harvest - because of his relationship to the family. Ruth was not a lazy or slothful person. She willingly worked hard to sustain not only herself but also her mother-in-law.

Work is God-ordained and blesses the worker as well as all society. Slothfulness has always been condemned by God (Ecc. 9:10; 2 Thes. 3:10), yet in our ease-age many people consider it a real attainment to be able to get out of work. Many have joined the cult of comfort and worshiped the god of leisure and luxury. A smooth running home is not possible if the woman in it is lazy. God's word, especially Proverbs, speaks so often of the sin and the consequences of slothfulness. Many economic ills of families and of nations could be solved simply by a willingness to work hard. So we see Ruth's humility and willingness to minister in this chapter and see that God gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5-7).

Now, in chapter three of the book of Ruth, Ruth, through advice from Naomi, who played the role of matchmaker, makes a tender plea to Boaz and prompts Boaz to fulfill an obligation due the family of Elimelech, the levirate law of marriage (Deut. 25:5-10). Following Naomi's advice, Ruth lays herself at the feet of Boaz and appeals marriage to him. When Boaz wakes, realizing Ruth is at his feet, she says, "Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a near kinsman."

Boaz is grateful for Ruth's kindness but realizes there is a kinsman nearer than he to Ruth. Boaz leaves Ruth and goes to give the nearer kinsman an opportunity to fulfill his duty. Boaz swears to Ruth that he will fulfill his duty if the other man does not. Ruth returns to Naomi who instructs her to wait and see how things turn out. Naomi is confident that Boaz will act

immediately. Scholars debate whether anything improper took place between Ruth and Boaz when Ruth laid herself at the feet of Boaz. The following is an observation made by F.B. Huey, Jr., the author of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*:

“Those who interpret a sexual relationship in the events reflect the twentieth-century cultural conditioning of sexual permissiveness. They fail to appreciate the element of Ruth’s trust that Boaz would not dishonor her whom he wanted for his wife. They fail to appreciate the cultural taboos of Ruth’s time that would have prevented a man of Boaz’s position for taking advantage of Ruth, thereby destroying her reputation and perhaps endangering his own. Biblical writers were not squeamish about describing sexual encounters, but the writer of Ruth has deliberately refrained from saying there was a liaison between Ruth and Boaz. If read carefully and with sensitivity, it becomes clear that he was just the opposite. Both Ruth and Boaz acted virtuously in a situation they knew could have turned out otherwise. Chastity was not an unknown virtue the ancient world.”

Finally, in chapter four of the book of Ruth, Boaz meets the close relative who gave the right and responsibility of Ruth to Boaz. Thus, Boaz takes Ruth as his wife and together the two have a son. The son is named Obed and Naomi becomes nurse to the child. The son is named after Ruth’s late husband in an effort to carry on the family name (Deut. 25:5,6).

The book of Ruth has two purposes:

- 1) TO ILLUSTRATE HOW GOD REWARDS THOSE WHO MAKE WISE, SPIRITUAL CHOICES AND WHO SHOW STEADFAST LOYALTY and
- 2) TO EXPLAIN HOW RUTH, A MOABITNESS, CAME TO BE AN ANCESTOR OF THE MESSIAH.

The book also reveals examples of commendable character. Ruth showed nobility of character in her loyalty to Naomi, and Boaz showed noble character as an employer and believer in God’s promises and commands.

Faith in God was the basis of Ruth’s life, and, through her example, we women can make practical applications to our lives. Ruth made her noble decision in chapter one of our study, and she never looked back. We, as Christians, need to walk worthy of our calling (Eph. 4:1) and walk in truth (1 John 4). We need to live daily to glorify God. Ruth also handled life’s problems and moved on. We all have problems we have to handle, and we need to learn to depend on God as Ruth did and “cast all our cares upon him” (1 Peter 5:7).

Ruth also had love and compassion for others. Both Naomi and Boaz pronounced benedictions upon Ruth for her kindness (Ruth 1:8, 2:12). These benedictions were answered later in the blessings showered upon her, for kindness extended is a boomerang which returns to bless. It is unalterably true that "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." One command to Christians is: "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another" (Eph 4:32).

Yet, what a dearth of kindness and tender-heartedness there is in the world today. Too often this is true even in the family circle. NOT SO WITH RUTH. Being kind is easier than apologizing later, and the Christian has only two alternatives. Therefore, we also need to have love and compassion for others with whom we come in contact. In Romans 12:15 we are told to "Rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep."

Compassion, care, concern, and love for others must be a part of the Christian life, and Ruth left us a good example to follow.

I hope these points of greatness about Ruth will influence all of us to want to strive harder to live the Christian life. Ruth truly was a great woman of the Bible and deserves our respect and is an excellent example of integrity, love, and godliness. The world would be a better place if we had more people like Ruth.

NEHEMIAH

Andy Robison

The Story

Judah's return from captivity was in full swing. Cyrus had decreed it. Zerubbabel had led back the first group. The Jews had begun worshiping God in their homeland again, and the rebuilding of the temple had been undertaken. The Passover had been celebrated. But the walls of the city still lay in ruins, a fact discovered by Nehemiah when he questioned travelers from his homeland.

For Nehemiah was not at home. Also a victim of the captivity's deportation policies, he had made the best of it and worked faithfully to attain the position of cupbearer to the world's most powerful king. When he heard of the disgraceful plight of the physical location of his people's spiritual heritage, his heart was overcome with sorrow and his will burdened to do something about it. At the gracious sensitivity of his boss, the authoritative king, he received permission to temporarily go home and get started.

Upon arrival he secretly surveyed the damages of war and subsequent erosion. The walls were in a shambles. In the face of ridicule, Nehemiah called upon the people to start rebuilding, and they did. Soon, the mockery became potentially violent opposition. Thus, the workers had to make provisions to defend themselves. One-half of the work force was reduced to militaristically standing guard. The working half could only work with one hand while carrying a weapon in the other. Yet, by the apparent power of God through His people's "mind to work" (Nehemiah 4:6), the wall's building continued at an alarming pace. When it was done, it had taken only fifty-two days (6:15).

Throughout this exciting period of restoration, Nehemiah had to constantly put out fires of trouble—from without and within. Some Jewish brethren used their wealth to abuse the poor. Nehemiah objected, while abstaining from the luxurious positions that normally would have been afforded his office (5). Local residents opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem's defense and tried deceptive means to get it stopped. It was only Nehemiah's faithful reliance upon God that kept him from falling to their ploys.

Spiritual restoration accompanied the physical. Ezra the scribe read the book of the Law of Moses while the people reverently stood (8). The people confessed their wrongs and bound themselves to the covenant (9-10).

Tragically, when Nehemiah responsibly went back to his position in Babylon (13:6), the loyalty of the people to God began to decay. Storerooms of

the temple were used for housing pagan people's goods. The Sabbath was desecrated by an abundance of forbidden labor and trade. The Jews intermarried with the idolatrous people around them. When Nehemiah returned and found these desecrations, he was so frustrated that he "contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair" (13:25). If ever the Scriptures record an extreme case of righteous indignation, surely this is it.

The Lessons

Nehemiah is known as a great Bible character because of his impressive leadership. The burden is upon the student of God's word to determine what made the man such a leader. God worked mightily through the man, but it was not that God overpowered the man's free will. No, Nehemiah had engaged himself in some practices that made him useful to God. If students today can learn these, perhaps they can present themselves useful in the sight of their Master in heaven. Then, the balance of one working out his own salvation and God working in him (Phil. 2:12-13) will be achieved.

The Burden

Men may often proclaim a burden is laid upon their heart by some direct revelation. Nehemiah spoke of his purpose as one that God had put in his heart (2:12; cf. also 7:5). God may have revealed such purposes to his people in past times of miraculous revelation, as he did with Paul and his vision of a man of Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10), but now He does not. If one will proclaim a burden upon one's heart, it has more to do with the combination of ability, responsibility, and perhaps emotional ties.

Nehemiah had a deep emotional tie to Jerusalem. It was the spiritual heritage of his forefathers, for which they longed while in captivity. Psalm 137:1-6 paints a vivid picture of captives yearning for their blessed Jerusalem. Nehemiah experienced the same kinds of feelings. He would have rejoiced had good news come to him through Hanani and the others (1:2), but good news was not their report. Therefore, Nehemiah reports, "So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days ..." (1:4). The deep conviction of his heart was that Jerusalem deserved better. After all, the captivity had in essence ended. People were living there. There was no reason to leave the place in disarray. Doing such only betrayed the apathy of the people.

Nehemiah saw that the Israelites needed leadership to rouse them out of their carelessness, and he saw he had the opportunity to do it. While in the presence of the king, his countenance displayed his deep sorrow (2:2). When the king inquired as to the reason, Nehemiah, after praying, humbly explained the burden of his heart to the king and made proactive request that he could

do something about it (2:4-8). The king allowed him and used his far-reaching authority to make provisions for Nehemiah's purpose. A cupbearer to the king could have rested in his comfortable position, but Nehemiah saw the relationship as an opportunity to do good. Great servants of God often have to make a choice between comfortable living and conscientious service (cf. Heb. 11:24-26).

This may provide us a clue as to how God lays burdens upon hearts in a non-miraculous age. Working through His Providence, God may place people in particular positions of ability and/or power. When they reach these positions, if faithful, they may just see that their circumstance in life affords them great opportunity to do good. Couple that with a burden upon the heart that grows out of an emotional connection, and you have the makings of one who is ready for God to work through him mightily.

One example is the carpenter who was overseeing the building of the local meetinghouse of the church. He was up all hours of the night when the preacher stopped by the worksite to check on him. When asked why he was working so late, the humble servant replied, "I may not be able to preach the gospel to the masses throughout the world, but I am able to see that this building gets built, and that it gets done right." He wanted a good place for the church to meet that would be noticeable in the community. The circumstances of his life had taught him the skills necessary to lead in such an endeavor. He saw when the work needed done and was diligent to do it. Perhaps he knew the old adage, "Ability plus opportunity equals responsibility." It is that adage that defines Nehemiah's great leadership.

Brethren in the Lord's church, with differing talents and abilities (cf. 1 Cor. 12), might quite naturally have different areas of interest which spur them to good works therein. One may have righteous indignation over his society's immorality and become involved in the political world to help right the wrongs (cf. Jeremiah 9:1-2). Another (or the same one) may feel the sting of denominational doctrines working their pernicious influence to lead men astray and become a preacher, debater, teacher, and author defending the truth (Jeremiah 20:9). Still someone else may see the plight of malnourished children in third world countries and become part of a relief effort. A doctor may join a medical missions team; a trained teacher may head a class for VBS; a farmer may instruct the unknowing on how to tend crops for the best yield. There are a thousand good works that may be done, and God provides that in His church there are people who have learned the abilities to deal with these. All that remains is for those with the abilities to step up and use their talents for the benefit of the Master (cf. Matthew 25:14-30).

The Motivator

It may have been due to his daily association with the movers and shakers of the world that Nehemiah learned the ability to motivate people. Nehemiah 2:11-20 relates how he was able to inspire the populace to finally begin the work they should have long ago accomplished.

No small part of this leader's appeal was the authority upon which he stood. He had rights and provisions from the king. More than that, he had the approval of Almighty God. It was good that these two worked together, for sometimes they do not. In such cases, Christians "ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Barring some extreme collisions of purpose, though, the leader will be one who aims to operate within the confines of the law, for the governing authorities are to be obeyed by the godly (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Nehemiah was able to appeal to the people with a plea that might have been worded thusly: "The God of heaven wants us to do this and the king has allowed us. What is there that should hold us back?" Heaven hasn't revealed the exact words of Nehemiah's plea, but simply allowed him this summary: "And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me" (2:18). This plea was enough. "So they said, 'Let us rise up and build.' Then they set their hands to this good work" (2:18b).

A similar appeal may be made to Christians today, based on the same sort of authorization and opportunity. God wants His people to spread the gospel. With America's prosperity, He has provided the finances to do so, if people will learn to give. With America's freedoms, He has thrown open the doors of men's minds. When government does not hinder what message is taught, people are especially free to decide for themselves. Here is an opportunity to preach the gospel in freedom. Brethren have the means and the ability, but precious few take on the leadership.

Another key to Nehemiah's motivation was his humility. He did not receive the luxurious provisions normally afforded a governor of the land (5:14-19). By contrast, some apparently felt themselves above the lowly tasks of the common man (3:5). Nehemiah did not let his position go to his head. Had he done so, he would have been in no position to correct the problems of usury addressed in the first part of chapter 5. The people were taxing each other. Could one imagine such a practice being denounced by a ruler who shamelessly taxed the people simply to provide himself some state-of-the-art creature comforts? People are more likely to follow one who does not take advantage of them. One would assume that is the reason elders are commanded to shepherd the flock of God willingly, not as lords, but as examples (1 Peter 5:1-4). There is a fine line between inspiring and coercing people in a work. If that line is not trod carefully, people will either wallow in their apathy or rebel in their anger.

The Persistence

The dream for rebuilding would not have been realized without Nehemiah's firm persistence in the face of opposition. He faced off with stiff opponents using all sorts of devious means to stop the building. In 2:19 they try false accusation. In 4:1-3 they resort to ridicule. The threat of violence is employed in 4:7-9. An ingenious conspiracy is attempted in chapter 6. Discouragement is the aim of 6:5-7. Through it all, Nehemiah continued. He knew the "God of heaven" was behind the work, and, therefore, had a clear-cut idea of who the enemies were (2:20). He prayed for deliverance (4:4-6). He knew how to actively respond (4:13-23). Here was a man who knew the importance of never giving up because he knew the justness of his cause.

Christians have the goal before them of helping others attain an eternally blissful existence in heaven. Enemies along the way will mock, ridicule, threaten, resist, and aim to thwart many efforts of Christians to do so (John 15:18-19; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-16). Those who persist will be the ones rewarded (Matthew 5:10-12; Mark 10:28-31; Acts 5:41; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-27; 3:5, 12, 21).

Nehemiah also faced opposition from the indifference and neglect of his brethren within the community. They charged usury, taking advantage of the poor (5:1-13). To the shame of the temple-keepers, Tobiah was allowed to use the temple storerooms while the articles of the house of God found no such place (13:4-9). The Levites were supposed to be given provisions but were, rather, neglected (13:10-13). The Sabbath was ignored and abused (13:15-22). The atrocity of intermarriage with pagans that had caused so much trouble for God's people in the first place was again repeated (13:23-28; cf. Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Nehemiah 10:29-31). Nehemiah boldly took a stand against all this ungodliness. He loved his people and wanted them to work. He needed to motivate them to their full potential of labor, but he would not allow such needs to compromise conviction for the truth. When the truth and the people Nehemiah led came into conflict, he abandoned popularity and proclaimed righteousness.

Likewise, leaders in physical governments and the spiritual kingdom of the church cannot bow to popularity when leading. All decisions and directions need to be grounded in truth. Too many congregations' leaderships seem to fear the losing of members and money if a stand is taken. Let the stand be made! Let the chips fall where they may. Without faithfulness to God, all motivation to all work, no matter how grand the cause, is vain (cf. Psalm 127:1).

Prayer

At the core of Nehemiah's success was his disposition to pray. He prayed upon hearing the devastating news of Jerusalem's condition (1:4-11) and before petitioning the king for earthly authority for his work (2:4). He prayed in response to the threats from his enemies (4:4,5, 9; 6:14; 13:29), leaving vengeance in the hand of the One to whom it really belonged (Romans 12:19; Deuteronomy 32:35, cf. Psalm 35). Finally, he prayed for reward for his work (5:19; 6:9; 13:14, 22, 31). Here was a man who knew how to work, knew how to motivate, knew how to use his talents and exercise his opportunities for good, but he never became so arrogant as to think he could rely upon himself.

God's people may have many great abilities and opportunities, but the work will not get done without the power of God behind it. He is the One able to accomplish things (Ephesians 3:20-21). He just uses His faithful people as willing tools (cf. Acts 14:27). Let those who would be leaders "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Who of God's servants could afford not to plead for such operating power and blessings?

Attention to the Whole

Nehemiah was careful not to focus on only one aspect of the people's lives. He didn't want just the brawn of the laborers. He didn't desire only the brains of the genealogical researchers. He wanted everyone to be in full, faithful communion with God. He made it a point to lead in the confession of national sins (9). He saw to it that the city's inhabitants were led in worship and understanding of the preaching (8). He gave careful attention to following the letter of the law, excluding from the priesthood anyone whose registry could not be verified (7:64).

Military leaders may conquer by might; businessmen may build through their skills; but unless attention is given to the moral and spiritual needs of a people, greatness will elude a lasting relationship with any people. Leaders must not only give attention to economics and material things, but they must also make sure men are prepared as people of character with strong moral values.

Conclusion

Thus, Nehemiah became known as a great Bible character. He had what the task took because he was willing to give himself. Great things were accomplished through him because he relied on God and offered himself, with all his abilities, possessions, and position to the service of the Almighty. One wonders if like leaders will rise up in a troubled nation, the local church, and the struggling family.

PAUL

Albert E. Farley

The theme of our lectureship this year is truly a great one: GREAT PEOPLE OF THE BIBLE. The word *great* is defined by Webster as "notably large in size ... remarkable in magnitude, degree, or effectiveness ... eminent, distinguished ... chief or preeminent over others ... markedly superior in character or quality ... an outstandingly superior or skillful person."¹

The Bible defines true greatness. In Matthew 5:19, Jesus said, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."² The word Jesus used in this passage is *megas*, from which we derive our prefix *mega* – as in megabyte. The people whom we have been studying this week are great because they were obedient in doing the commandments of God and in teaching them to others.

True greatness is defined by Jesus in Matthew 20:20-28. "... whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Again, in Matthew 18:1-4, Jesus said, "... Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

My assignment is to examine the greatness of the apostle Paul. To what extent was Paul a great man? In what ways was he great? How has his greatness benefited us? How may we follow in his example in achieving the same greatness in our own lives? Note these ways I have selected to describe and discuss the greatness of Paul.

He Received a Great Heritage and Education

Saul was born a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin. In Acts 22:3, he said, "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." In Romans 11:1, he said, "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." The circumstance of his birth gave Paul (or Saul) a major advantage over many other people. In Romans 3:1, Paul asked and answered, "What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?"

¹ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition, (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1994).

² All scripture references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."

Saul was from Tarsus of Cilicia. Acts 21:39; Acts 22:3. "At that time Tarsus was the rival of Athens and Alexandria as a place of learning and philosophical research (Strabo, xiv, 5)"³ Paul's words reflect a familiarity with Greek poets and their works. Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12. Some compare Saul with Moses in this respect.

... Dr. Bentley has not hesitated to affirm that 'as Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, so it is manifest from this chapter alone (Acts xxvii) if nothing else had been now extant, that Paul was a great master in all the learning of the Greeks' (Boyle Lectures, serm. iii, sub init.).⁴

Saul not only grew up in a Jewish household, but, at an early age, he traveled to Jerusalem and studied under Gamaliel, one of the greatest of all of the Jewish master teachers. Acts 22:5. Of Gamaliel it is said,

Gamaliel is supposed to be the person of that name who is celebrated in the writings of the Talmudists as one of the seven teachers to whom the title 'Rabban' was given ...⁵

He Worshipped God Under the Law with Great Devotion (and Delusion).

The Book of Acts clearly reveals his zeal. When Stephen was cast out of Jerusalem and stoned by the angry mob, the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. Acts 7:58. In Acts 8:1-3, the Bible says,

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Saul was a Pharisee. Acts 23:6; 26:4-6. In view of the stern rebukes against the Pharisees by Christ (Matthew 23), this may not seem to have been of any advantage. However, of all the Jewish sects of the time, the Pharisees had a noble heritage of preserving and protecting the scriptures and the Jewish way

³ John McClintock, James Strong, "Paul," *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, VII (Grand Rapids, Reprinted 1981), p. 789.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 790

of life against the efforts of their enemies to destroy them.⁶ The fact that they, as a body, had become hypocritical and extreme is to their shame.

Young Saul was a Pharisee, but he was not a hypocrite. He said of himself, in Acts 22:19-20,

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

In all of this, Saul strongly affirmed that all he did was done with a pure conscience. "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day ... And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." Acts 23:1; 24:16. It is true that Saul was sinning against God in his service; he was "kicking against the pricks." But the fact that he was doing what he thought was pleasing to God was the same spirit that, later (when he learned the truth and properly educated his conscience), sent him preaching the gospel to the Gentiles in the face of great opposition and persecution!

Later, after his conversion, he felt great guilt for his sins. He said, in referring to the grace of God in his conversion,

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: *but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.* And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. (1 Timothy 1:12-15)

He was Converted With a Great Miracle

The conversion of Saul is a great example of God's amazing grace. Jesus forcibly injected Himself into Saul's life in order that he might become a pattern of God's "all (entire) longsuffering" to those who would afterwards believe on Him.

⁶ See the writer's comments in "Extremism of Pharisees," *West Virginia School Of Preaching Victory Lectures* (Moundsville, 1998), p. 36.

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:16-17)

Saul's conversion is recorded in three different places in the book of Acts: Acts 9:1-19; Acts 22:6-16; and Acts 26:12-15.

Even though Saul was confronted by Christ in a miraculous manner while he was traveling to Damascus, and even though Jesus told Ananias that Saul was a chosen vessel to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, to kings, and to the children of Israel, God yet remained no respecter of persons and required of Saul that he be truly born again before his sins could be remitted. Acts 10:34-35; John 3:3-5. In fact, his example of conversion – like all other conversion examples – is a great conversion case that ought to be studied and taught by the church and emulated by the lost world today.

When the bright light fell upon Saul on the road outside of Damascus, and when Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" Jesus replied, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest ..." Acts 9:1-5. Saul's response indicated his new faith: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord told him to go into the city and it would be told him what "thou must do." These few verses, alone, teach, emphatically, that Saul was *not* saved on the road to Damascus.

Luke's narrative says that Saul was aided into the city and that he spent the next three days praying – without sight, without food, and without water. This is a genuine demonstration of godly sorrow that produces repentance. 2 Corinthians 7:10. Ananias did restore Saul's sight. This, however, did not remit his sins. How do we know? In Acts 22:16, when he later rehearsed his own conversion, Paul said that Ananias said to him, "And now why tarest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Therefore, we know assuredly that Saul was not saved until three days *after* he entered Damascus and only *after* he believed that Jesus was the Christ, *after* he repented of his sins, and *after* he was baptized for the explicit purpose of washing away his sins! Yes, the conversion of Saul and the divine account of his conversion are truly great, indeed!

He was Charged With a Great Commission

Saul's commission, like that of the other apostles, was great. The several accounts of his commission in Acts contain the scope of this charge:

... But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things

which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee ... To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. (26:16, 18) ... he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: (9:15) ... The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard (22:14, 15) ... Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. (22:21) ... Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. (23:11)

That Saul was commissioned to be an apostle of Christ is thus clearly shown. The above divinely written commissions prove it. Paul claimed his apostleship at least twenty-five times in his writings.⁷ In Romans 1:1, he wrote, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of Christ." In 1 Corinthians 1:1, he wrote, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God ..." When his apostleship was called into question at Corinth, he said, "Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto other, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 9:1,2) In his second letter to them, he said, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." (12:12) As an apostle, Paul wrote with the authority of Jesus Christ, himself, and it behooves the church to follow his teachings on all matters.

He Served With a Great Humility and Dedication

Saul accepted his apostleship with great humility. Yet, he would not allow anyone or anything to prevent his performing his duty to the utmost. He wrote, in 1 Corinthians 15:9,10,

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

With the grace of God with him, with Christ strengthening him, and with the Holy Spirit guiding him, Paul turned the Roman world upside down with three great missionary journeys. The first journey is recorded in Acts 13:1 – 15:35;

⁷ Romans 1:1, 5; 11:13; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 9:1, 2; 9:5; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 4:9; 11:5; 12:11, 12; Galatians 1:1, 17; 2:8; Ephesians 1:1; 3:5; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:6; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:1; 1:11; Titus 1:1

the second is recorded in Acts 15:36 – 18:22; and the third is recorded in Acts 18:23 – Acts 21:15. In addition to these, he attended the conference in Jerusalem concerning the question of circumcision (Acts 15:1-35) and, finally, made the voyage to Rome to stand before Caesar. (Acts 27:1 – 26:31) The number and significance of these great works are staggering to the imagination.

Paul's service was accomplished in the face of great personal persecution and suffering. In the press of defending his apostleship and service to the church at Corinth, we have some insight into the depth of his ministry. (2 Corinthians 11:21-33) In speaking of his work he wrote,

I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

Truly, his sufferings were great. This was foretold by Jesus when he called Saul into the apostleship. (Acts 9:16) The recorded imprisonments of Paul are a testimony to his commitment to Christ. In Philippi, he and Silas were beaten, thrown into the inner prison and placed in stocks. Acts 16:19-40. In Jerusalem he was almost torn into pieces and cast into prison. Acts 21:30 – 23:30. He spent several years in prison at Caesarea. Finally, he was taken to Rome where he was imprisoned at least two whole years. Acts 28:16-31.⁸ Paul makes reference to his imprisonments in his writings.⁹

⁸ Some authorities see evidence in Paul's epistles that he was imprisoned at Rome twice.

⁹ Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Philippians 1:13; 4:22; 2 Timothy 4:16-18; Philemon 9, 10; Hebrews 13:23, 24.

In addition to his sufferings inflicted by others, Paul also had a personal infirmity in his body. 2 Corinthians 12. We are not told the nature of this affliction,¹⁰ but we are told that it was given to him to keep him from being exalted due to the abundance of the revelations that were given to him by the Lord. We also know that it was so great and severe that he besought the Lord on three separate occasions to have it removed. Paul called it "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan." (12:7) The Lord did not remove Paul's pain but said, "My grace is sufficient for thee for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul accepted this with humble submission. (12:9, 10)

He Wrote With Great Fluidity

We have little knowledge of the works of most of the apostles of Christ. We are of the belief they carried out their commission with great faithfulness. We know somewhat of the works of Peter and John, but of the other apostles – besides Paul – we know very little. The book of Acts, to a great degree, supplies our information about Paul. This record is greatly supplemented by Paul's letters.

Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, for certain, 13 books of the New Testament. His name is the first word in these books (Romans through Philemon). Many believe he also wrote the book of Hebrews although his name is not found in it. However, we believe the evidence (both internal and external) is strong enough to ascribe it to him.¹¹

Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:9-13. He wrote with the authority of an apostle and his words were considered to be "scriptures" by the apostle Peter.

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

He Died With a Great Hope

When Paul approached the end of his work and his life, he did so with great faith and confidence.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the

¹⁰ Some speculate that Paul's affliction involved his eyes. This is based upon his reference to his eyes in Galatians 4:15, and in the large letters he used in ending the letter. 6:11.

¹¹ See Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction To The New Testament*, Grand Rapids, 1979, pp. 297-301, for a good discussion of this subject.

heavens. (2 Corinthians 5:1) For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

After he gave his first answer before Caesar in Rome, he wrote,

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing ... At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18)

Yes, the apostle Paul was – and is – great, indeed. He was great, in part, because of his great heritage and early education. He was great because of his great desire to serve God with a clear conscience. He was great because of God's great grace and mercy poured upon him in his conversion. He was great because of the greatness in scope and consequence of his missionary journeys. He was great because of his great dedication and humble commitment to Christ – to His gospel and to His church. He was great because of his many letters in which he revealed so much of God's Holy Word to the church. He was great because of the great hope by which he lived and in which he died.

Saul – the apostle Paul – lost himself in total sacrifice to the will of God in Christ Jesus. He said, in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Today, we thank God for the life of this great man. If we would be great in the eyes of the Lord, we would do well to heed his admonition and plea in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Ben Jones

Introduction

It is only fitting that a lectureship titled “Great People of the Bible” include a man our Savior called the greatest among those born of women (Matthew 11:11). While John was not a part of the kingdom himself, he exhibited a Christ-like measure of greatness that was characterized by his service to the Lord. Through his mighty task of preparing the way for the Messiah, John earned the common designation of the “forerunner of Christ.” This name is a most accurate description of the life and work of John, of whom the prophet Malachi said “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me” (Malachi 3:1). However, while one might argue the matter of semantics, the New Testament writers did not use the term forerunner in reference to John. In our lesson, let us examine John’s greatness by considering some of the names he wore during his service.

John: A Name Given By God

The name John derives from a Hebrew word meaning “Jehovah is a gracious giver.” Considering the circumstances surrounding both John’s birth and his life, a more appropriate name could not be imagined. Luke’s simple introduction to John’s parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, describes the couple as righteous and faithful before God, but without a child due to old age and a barren womb. While Zacharias was serving in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared and announced “your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.” (Luke 1:13). One can only imagine the heartfelt petitions the couple may have lifted up to God. By His infinite grace, Jehovah once again granted a special child to His humble servants, recalling memories of Abraham and Sarah, Hannah and Elkanah, and Rachel and Jacob. Like Isaac, Samuel, and Joseph before him, John was a source of joy to his parents, prompting Elizabeth to proclaim “thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people” (Luke 1:25).

This special child, however, would cause many people beyond his parents to rejoice. Like Isaac, Samuel, and Joseph, John had a unique role to play in the scheme of redemption. And, while those three great men each made contributions to the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, it would be John’s privilege and responsibility to herald the coming of the King. John’s birth represented much more than the gracious answer to a single family’s prayer. Instead, it marked the complete unveiling of plans God had prepared before the foundations of the world. Zacharias himself prophesied that John

would give knowledge of salvation to God's people, give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and guide the feet of the people into the way of peace (Luke 1:76-79). God has given no greater gift to men than His own son. God gave no greater charge to man than to prepare the way for the coming of His son. Through the work of John, God's grace was made manifest in Christ to the entire world.

At John's circumcision, the crowd tried to persuade his parents to name the child after his father. Zacharias, still mute after his encounter with the angel, asked for a tablet and wrote "His name is John" (Luke 1:63). The crowd marveled. Today, men still marvel at the gracious gift of God made known to the world by a man whose name was John.

The Voice: A Name Taken By John

The name a man takes upon himself to wear can say much about his character. The villainous Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV wore the self-appointed title, Epiphanes; essentially translated God is manifest. It is not uncommon to hear an athlete described as "the world's fastest man," or a politician labeled as "the world's most powerful woman." A person's self image has much to do with his or her goals, demeanor, and conduct. It is significant, then, that John labeled himself simply as the voice.

The New Testament records that the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to John to ask "Who are you?" (John 1:19). John admitted that he was not the Christ, nor Elijah, or the Prophet. He then quoted from Isaiah 40:3, saying "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord" (John 1:23). John had no misconceptions about his role as the harbinger of Christ. His self-image was rightly a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah.

The voice in the wilderness, however, was but one of the designations appropriate to John. Malachi described him as both the messenger of the Lord (Malachi 3:1) and Elijah the prophet (Malachi 4:5). These prophecies obviously form a complete picture of the forerunner of Christ, but perhaps there is some significance in John's quotation of Isaiah. Like all faithful prophets of the Almighty, John devoted himself entirely to the service of the Lord. Yet his task was so important that God's message became the defining element of his life. John performed no miracles, conducted his ministry in the middle of the wilderness, and dressed and behaved in a seemingly odd manner. Jesus noted later that the people did not go into the wilderness to see a "reed shaken by the wind" or a "man clothed in soft garments" (Matthew 11:7-8). Instead, they went to hear the voice of a prophet. So singular was John's purpose that he personified himself as simply the voice.

Furthermore, it seemed to be John's unwavering acceptance of this divinely appointed role that made his message so powerful. John was a man who was quite simply born to preach. He had no concerns for self, no interests for compromise. His message was the Christ, the Kingdom, and the judgment, and no audience could shake his resolve to proclaim God's word. John, no doubt, caused a small stir when he charged the Pharisees and Sadducees to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:8). Such plain and decisive language from many pulpits today would surely offend a few individuals. It is no small surprise that John's eventual demise came as a result of his fearless commitment to preach God's word (Matthew 14:1-4).

Peter exhorted Christians to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). Certainly, there is a need for men in all places today to give greater diligence to speaking words of truth and righteousness. No greater example can be found than a man who viewed himself as simply "the voice."

The Immerser: A Name Given By the People

Perhaps the best known name worn by John, the son of Zacharias, is the Baptist. This, of course, is a transliteration of the Greek, properly translated as John the Immerser (Matthew 3:1). This also seems to be the only name of John that is not directly related to an Old Testament prophecy. It is significant, then, that John earned this name by practice rather than divine appointment.

There is nothing inherently noteworthy about earning a name that describes one's actions. Jack the Ripper is an easily understood moniker, although not the best way to introduce oneself to new neighbors. Calling someone the Immerser, however, is not just a description of activity but an unmistakable mark of service. John had been authorized by God to baptize for the remission of sins, and baptize he did. Matthew records that "Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matthew 3:5-6). The book of John records that he was baptizing at Aenon near Salim "because there was much water there" (John 3:23). The extent of John's teaching and practice can be seen as well by the presence of disciples all the way to Ephesus (Acts 19).

There are many aspects of John's baptism that will not be discussed, given the space and focus of this lesson. The following facts may briefly be noted from the scriptures. First, John administered a baptism in water that was of repentance (Mark 1:4) and unto repentance (Matthew 3:11). Second, John's baptism involved confessing sins (Matthew 3:6). Third, the purpose of the baptism was for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). John noted that while he baptized with water, one mightier (Christ) was coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11). John was, therefore, hesitant to

baptize Jesus when the two met as adults (Matthew 3:13). Yet, it was Jesus who confirmed the divine authority of John's baptism (cf Matthew 21:25) and who assured John "for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

John's baptism was part of God's righteous plan. Despite his doubts concerning Christ's need to be baptized, John willingly submitted to the will of God. He baptized unknown numbers of other disciples during his brief ministry. He is known today as "The Immerser" because of his clear commitment to following the Lord. Truly, the greatness of this devoted servant can be seen in the name that he earned through his obedience.

Elijah to Come: A Name Given By Christ

While all of the Old Testament prophecies about John relate to the subsequent coming of Christ, the appearance of Elijah is closely tied to the Savior's own entrance. Apparently, there was some confusion as to whether this would be a literal resurrection of Elijah, as the Jews specifically asked John if he was Elijah, to which he replied negatively (John 1:21). Some Jews later believed Jesus to be Elijah (Matthew 16:14). Yet, when Jesus was asked whether or not He was the Coming One, he appealed to John's ministry as a proof of His own identity. "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:13-14). Christ argues that the people went to hear John because they understood he was a prophet of God. But John was not just a prophet; he was the Elijah to come, spoken of by the prophet Malachi. And if Elijah has come again, the time of the Christ is at hand.

In the midst of this discourse, Christ states "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). In these words we see the greatness of John exemplified through one of the principal doctrines of Christianity: service. In relation to the prophets of the past, John was the greatest because of his proximity to Christ. He came "to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe" (John 1:7). Yet, John himself would not be a part of the kingdom. John's task was to draw man's attention to the coming of Christ and then fade out of the picture himself. As John wrote "He was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light" (John 1:8) On one occasion, some of John's disciples were dismayed that people were leaving John to follow Christ. John humbly responded. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30) Though John would never see the Kingdom in his earthly life, his ministry foreshadowed the measure of a true disciple of Christ. "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

God's prophets had always suffered persecution and death, but those faithful men all seemed to view their message like Jeremiah's "fire in the bones." John was not the first man to lose his life at the hands of an unreceptive and hostile audience. John also had to contend with the temptations of a popular following. Many preachers since John have stumbled under the weight of large crowds and devoted disciples. John, however, was a man uniquely qualified for his task. His great efforts led to what he considered a great reward. "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled" (John 3:29).

Conclusion

John was a very special man prepared for a very special role. His entire life seemed to be centered on fulfilling the wonderful plan of God through the coming of Jesus Christ. His divinely given name, John, reminds us of God's grace and mercy. His self-identification, the Voice, inspires us to view our own lives as tools in the hand of the Almighty. His nickname, the Immerser, encourages us toward humble obedience to the Lord's will. His prophetic title, Elijah to come, gives focus to our one, enduring goal, pointing others to Christ. Truly John was a great person of the Bible, and his example calls us to aspire to our own greatness, through our service to God and man.

I AM THE RESURRECTION

David R. Powell

John 11:1-45 (Note vs. 25)

Objective: Jesus Christ is the hope of immortality.

Introduction:

1. In 1974 Elisabeth Ross and J. William Worden conducted a survey in which they asked 6,000 health care providers if working with the dying presented any difficulties. 98% answered in the affirmative by acknowledging that working with the dying confronted them with their own mortality.¹
2. Lazarus confronts us with the reality of mortality.
 - a. Lazarus, along with his sisters, Mary and Martha, lived in Bethany, a village on the eastern slope of Mount Olive some two miles from Jerusalem.
 - b. Jesus, when visiting Jerusalem, would spend time in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.
 - c. Once when Jesus was visiting in this home, He settled a dispute between Mary and Martha because Martha felt that Mary was not helping with the serving (Lk 10:38-42).
 - d. On another occasion Mary took a pound of “very costly oil of spikenard” and anointed Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair

¹ Therese A. Rando, *Grief, Dying, And Death* (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press Company, 1984), page vii.

(Jn 12:1-3). (By today's standards the cost of this oil is estimated at \$400.)

- e. While Jesus was in Bethabara (a city east of the Jordan and a two days journey from Bethany) Mary and Martha sent word to him that Lazarus was sick.
- f. After receiving word of Lazarus' sickness, Jesus remained two more days in Bethabara, during which time Lazarus dies.
- g. After two days of delay, Jesus began his two-day journey toward Bethany.

C. F. Andrews tells of two friends who served together during *World War One*. During combat one of the men was wounded and left helplessly in pain. His friend, in danger of losing his own life, came to his aid. The wounded man, looking up, said: "I knew you would come."²

- 3. As we zero in on this scene, many questions concerning our mortality are answered.

Body: From this scene we can view ...

I. **PLIGHT OF MORTALITY:** *Sickness & Death* - John 11:1-3.

A. Man has problems with the concept of mortality.

- 1. Theresa A. Rando, in her book *Grief, Dying, and Death*, writes:

² Barclay, page 81.

Many Americans go to great lengths to shield themselves from the realities of death. Take for example the fact that the vast majority of Americans no longer die in their own homes, but are sent to nursing homes and hospitals to die, away from their own familiar home, family, and friends. It is true that because of this family members need not be made uncomfortable by watching their loved one die ...³

2. R. J. Lifton, in his book *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (1968), mentions six factors that have caused Americans to have increased difficulty in dealing with mortality.

- *Urbanization.* Individuals are increasingly removed from nature and witnessing of the life/death cycle. They also have less of a sense of community with others ...
- *Exclusion of the aged and dying.* These people are segregated away from the general populace into nursing homes and hospitals ...
- *Movement toward the nuclear family.* With the absence of the extended family comes increased vulnerability to devastation and loss of support following the death of a loved one. There also is no opportunity to see aged relatives die and to experience death as a natural part of the life cycle.
- *Secularization from religion.* Religion used to minimize the impact of physical death by focusing on the hereafter, endow death with a special meaning a purpose, and provide for a future and immortality. With the decline in religion there has been a marked loss of these coping mechanisms.
- *Advances in medical technology.* These have given humanity more of a sense of control ... All of these advances have compromised the ability to understand death as a natural part of human life.
- *Mass death.* Previously if someone contemplated her own

³ Therese A. Rando, *Grief, Dying, And Death* (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press Company, 1984), page 5.

death she could assume that it would cause a ripple in humanity signifying some degree of importance. With today's constant threat of mass death and nuclear destruction, however, this is absent ... People learned to feel "good" that only 15 men died in Viet Nam instead of 30 on a particular day. In the past just one death would have been more horrifying.

B. Lazarus brings us to terms with our own mortality.

1. Word was sent to Jesus that Lazarus was sick (vs. 1-3).
2. Later, Jesus reveals to his disciples that Lazarus is dead (vs. 11-14).

C. Hospitals, medical clinics, nursing homes, pharmacies, and funeral homes all testify to the mortality of life.

Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899), an American lawyer, politician, and writer; challenged the Christian faith for nearly thirty years. Once when he was called upon to speak words of comfort at the grave of a baby that had died while lying on his mother's breast, said: "We do not know whether the grave is the end of life or the door of another, or whether the night here is not somewhere else at dawn."⁴

II. **PURPOSE OF THE MIRACULOUS:** *Glorify & Produce Faith* - Jn 11:4-16.

- A. When Jesus learned that Lazarus was sick, He delayed two days before beginning the two day journey to Bethany.
 1. Jesus, all-knowing, knew that Lazarus was sick unto death.
 2. Why did Jesus delay?

⁴ Ingersoll as quoted by George W. DeHoff. *Minister's Manual* (Murfreesboro. TN: DeHoff Publications), pages 102-103.

3. Jesus reveals three reasons for the delay.
 - a. "[F]or the glory of God (vs. 4)."
 - b. "[T]hat the Son of God may be glorified through it (vs. 4)."
 - c. "[T]hat you may believe (vs. 15)."
- B. The resurrection of Lazarus is the last miracle of Jesus that John records.
1. Sir John Reith stated: "I do not like crises; but I like the opportunities which they supply."
 2. When one reads the book of John. He or she needs to do so in view of the theme - Jn 20:30-31.
 3. In the book of John there is an emphasis on the I Am's of Jesus:
 - I am the bread of life (6:35).
 - I am the light of the world (8:12).
 - I am the door (10:7).
 - I am the good shepherd (10:11).
 - I am the resurrection and the life (11:25).
 - I am the way, truth, and the life (14:6).
 - I am the true vine (15:1).
 4. Jesus' claims are verified by the seven signs recorded by John.
 - Turning water to wine (2:1-11).
 - Healing of the Nobleman's son (4:46-54).
 - Healing of the lame man (5:1-9).
 - Feeding of the five thousand (6:16-21).
 - Walking upon the water (6:16-12).
 - Restoring sight to the blind man (9:1-12)
 - Resurrection of Lazarus (11:3, 9-44)

5. The resurrection of Lazarus served the theme of the book of John: “Then (adverb of time) many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.” - Jn 11:45.

III. **PROMISES MADE:** *Three Promises Jesus Made* - John 11:17-37.

- A. “Your brother will rise again (vs. 23).”
 1. Martha was aware that the dead would rise “at the last day.”
 2. Jesus demonstrated His power over death by raising Lazarus.
- B. “He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live (25).”
 1. This applies to those today who have embraced Christ.
 2. That the dead in Christ will resurrect is a source of great comfort to mortal man - I Thess 4:13-18.
 3. The believer may die, like Lazarus, but by Christ’s power will live, i.e., experience resurrection.
- C. “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die (26).”
 1. Even more important, is the possession of eternal life gained through faith in Christ.
 2. Those who have this life can never die in the sense of being separated from the source of life.
 3. Challenged to believe in Jesus’ power over mortality, Martha

made the very confession (27) for which this book was written, but she did not understand the implications of her own statement.

4. To her, Christ was not yet the absolute Lord of life and death.

[The scene to follow reveals that not only Martha, but also Mary, along with the by-standers, were lacking in faith - Jn 11:28-37.]

IV. **POWER OVER MORTALITY:** Lazarus Came Forth - John 11:38-44.

- A. Jesus, in the seven signs recorded in the book of John reveals his power.
 1. Turning water to wine (2:1-11) reveals Jesus' power over matter.
 2. Healing of the Nobleman's son (4:46-54) and the healing of the lame man (5:1-9) and the restoring sight to the blind man (9:1-12) reveal Jesus' power over sickness, disease, and infirmities.
 3. Feeding of the five thousand (6:16-21) demonstrates Jesus' power over the material realm.
 4. Walking upon the water (6:16-12) over the laws of nature.
 5. Resurrection of Lazarus (11:39-44) demonstrates that Jesus is the "resurrection and the life," He has the power over mortality.
- B. The resurrection of Lazarus speaks profoundly to mortal man.

1. As we sit by the bedside of the sick, we know that man's battle with mortality has already been won.
 2. As we sit by the grave, we recall that Jesus is the "resurrection and the life."
- C. Pattison lists five crises that occur when a person learns of impending death.⁵
- The stressful event poses a problem that by definition is insolvable in the immediate future. In this sense dying is the most stressful crisis because it is a crisis to which we bow but do not solve.
 - The problem taxes one's psychological resources since it is beyond one's traditional problem-solving methods. One is faced with a new experience with no prior experience to draw from, for although one has lived amidst death, that is far different from one's own death.
 - The situation is perceived as a threat or danger to the life goals of the person. Dying interrupts a person in the midst of life; and even in old age it abruptly confronts one with the goals one set in life.
 - The crisis period is characterized by a tension that mounts to a peak, then falls. As one faces the crisis of death knowledge, there is mobilization of either integrative or disintegrative mechanisms. The peak of anxiety usually occurs considerably before death.
 - The crisis situation awakens unresolved key problems from both the near and distant past. Problems of dependency, passivity, narcissism, identity, and more may be activated during the dying process. Hence one is faced not only with the immediate dying process but also with the unresolved feelings from one's own lifetime and its inevitable conflicts.
- D. Imagine facing death and not knowing Jesus, "the resurrection

⁵ Pattison as quoted by Therese A. Rando, *Grief, Dying, And Death* (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press Company, 1984), pages 200-201.

and the life.”

Conclusion:

1. This text can be viewed from the perspective of faith in Jesus: 1) Jesus *delayed*, 2) Lazarus *died*, 3) Mary and Martha were *disheartened*, and 4) faith was *deepened*: “Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him (45).”
2. We will face many challenges in life, none greater than sickness and death; yet our confidence is confirmed at the tomb of Lazarus.
3. That Jesus is the “resurrection and the life” provides us with these three precious promises (made originally to Martha).
 - a. “Your brother will rise again (vs. 23).”
 - b. “He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live (25).”
 - c. “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die (26).”
4. Immediately after providing these three promises, Jesus asked, “Do you believe this (26)?”

Biographies

Brenna Board

Brenna is married to John F. Board, and they reside in Bridgeport, West Virginia, with their two daughters, Kayleigh (9) and Emaleigh (5). They have lived and worked with the congregation in Bridgeport for over 10 years. They started off their marriage by working with the Oakwood Road congregation in Fairmont, WV, before moving to Yreka, California, and working with the congregation there for 2 ½ years.

John Board

John is the son of Jack and Margaret Board of Chester, West Virginia, and is the husband of the former Brenna Wiley of Fairmont, WV. John and Brenna have two daughters, Kayleigh (9) and Emaleigh (5).

John is the preacher for the Church of Christ in Bridgeport, WV. He received his education from Freed-Hardeman and Southern Christian University.

Peter Ray Cole

Peter Ray Cole graduated from the West Virginia School of Preaching in 1998. He currently works with the Washington Street church of Christ in Fairview, West Virginia, where he has been located for five years. He is continuing his education through Southern Christian University. He enjoys working with the West Virginia Christian Youth Camp.

Peter Ray married Amantha in 1998. Together they have one Great Dane, Sophie, she weighs 165 pounds.

Beth Cook

Beth Cook was born and raised in Elyria, Ohio, where she attended the East Broad Street Church of Christ. She is the daughter of Hazel and the late James Driver. Beth married Randy Cook on May 13, 1978. They have two sons. Their older son, Matthew, and his wife, Charla, live in Stantonville, Tennessee, where Matthew is the minister for the Stantonville Church of Christ. Their younger son, James (age 18) is a senior at North Marion High School.

Beth is a graduate of Ohio Valley College and Freed-Hardeman University. Randy and Beth have worked with the Oakhurst Church of Christ in Farmington, West Virginia, for the past eleven years, where Randy serves as the minister. Prior to this work, the Cooks served the church in Oakland, Maryland for ten years.

Beth teaches various Bible classes for children as well as ladies' Bible classes. She has taught for the past sixteen years at West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. She has spoken on various ladies days in West Virginia, Ohio, Maryland, and Connecticut.

Randy Cook

Randy Cook was born in Fairmont, West Virginia, in 1955 and graduated from Farmington High School in 1973. He began preaching in 1979 and attended the East Tennessee School of Preaching, graduating in 1983.

Randy served as minister for the Oakland Church of Christ in Oakland, Maryland, for ten years, and for the past eleven years he has served as the minister for the Oakhurst Church of Christ in Farmington. He has made two mission trips to India. He has worked with West Virginia Christian Youth Camp for twenty-six years and has co-directed Junior Week for twelve years.

Randy has been married to the former Beth Driver for twenty-six years, and they have two sons, Matthew, who preaches in Tennessee, and James, a senior at North Marion High School.

Nicholas Deiger

I was born and raised in Canfield, Ohio, where I also attended school. I am married to the former Ruth Graham, and we have two children: Nancy Lou, who died as the result of a car accident in 1995 at the age of 22, and Nicholas Howard, who is married to the former Nancy Louise Conaway.

I was in the farm machinery business from 1961 until 1969.

In February 1970, my wife Ruth and I moved to Memphis, Tennessee, to attend school. I graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in January of 1972.

I moved to Sandyville, West Virginia, and worked with the congregation there until October, 1979. I have been preaching for the Pumpkin Center Church of Christ since October, 1979.

I have worked at several different youth camps: Mid South in Henderson, Tennessee; Northeastern in Ohio; Camp Concern in Pennsylvania; Ohio Valley in Ohio; and West Virginia Christian youth Camp in Pennsboro, West Virginia. I have served as a teacher, counselor, cook. I am co-director with Steve Snider of Senior Week and, for the past several years, have been president of the board of Directors of West Virginia Christ Youth Camp.

I also make a trip to Murmansk, Russia each fall to teach in the school there.

Albert E. Farley

Albert Farley was born at Crum, West Virginia, April 26, 1942, the son of William H. and Clista Spaulding Farley and was raised at Longacre, WV. He is a graduate of Montgomery High School (1960) and served four years in the U.S. Navy. He attended Ohio Valley College (1964-66), where he met and married Nancy Ann Brewer. They have four children: Scott, Clista (Heintzman), Rebecca (Ragle), and Elisabeth; and four grandchildren: Bethany and Darren Heintzman and Aaron and Andrew Ragle.

Albert preached his first sermon (1964) at Red Bush, OH. He began full-time preaching in 1966 at Belington, WV. He has also worked with WV congregations at Chesapeake, Weston, Crum, Webster Springs, and Salem, where he has lived since 1982.

He is a graduate of Glenville State College (BA in Elementary Education) and taught the fifth grade at Crum Elementary School. He completed ten hours of graduate work with the Alabama School of Religion. He spoke five days each week on the “*Gospel Minutes*” radio program on WHAW, Weston (1972-76). He spoke on the local cable television station at Webster Springs, WV (1976-80) and on the “*Bible Study Program*,” (radio) on WHAW, Weston (1980-82). He has edited *West Virginia Christian* since 1993.

Janie Gallagher

Janie Gallagher is a native of Chester, West Virginia. She attended Freed-Hardeman University and graduated from Fairmont State University with a degree in education. She is married to Brent Gallagher, the minister for the Oakwood Road church of Christ. They have three children: Ryan, a youth minister for the church in Hamilton, Alabama; Amy, a sophomore at Freed-Hardeman, and Jason, a junior in high school.

Brent Gallagher

Brent Gallagher was born in Dover, Ohio. He is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University and Harding Graduate School. He is married to the former Janie Higginbotham. They have three children: Ryan, a youth minister for the church in Hamilton, Alabama; Amy, a sophomore at Freed-Hardeman; and Jason, a junior in high school. He has served churches in New Matamoras, Ohio; Pine Grove, West Virginia; and is currently in his fifteenth year with the Oakwood Road congregation in Fairmont, West Virginia.

Phil Grear

Phil was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and graduated from Parkersburg South High School. He graduated from Harding University in 1974 and since then has preached for churches in Sissonville, WV (1974-

1976), Prosperity, WV (1976-1979), Farmington, WV (1979-1986), Cambridge, OH (1986-2000), and East High St. in Springfield, OH (2000-present), where he also serves as an elder.

Phil holds two gospel meetings per year and has made mission trips to Italy, Cuba, and Scotland. He is a staff writer for *West Virginia Christian* and associate editor of *Upon The Rock*. He is the author of a book entitled *Probing The Prophets*. He has worked at West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. He is on the Board of Directors of Midwestern Children's Home.

Phil has been married to his wife, Darleen, for thirty years, and they are the parents of two daughters, Amy Andrick of Galloway, OH, and Katie Gilchrist of Moundsville, WV. Amy's husband, Luke, is a computer technician. Katie's husband, Jack, is a student at the West Virginia School of Preaching. They have two granddaughters, Joanna and Emily Andrick.

Frank Higginbotham

Frank Higginbotham was born in New Martinsville, West Virginia, February 21, 1933. He is the son of Mr. & Mrs. A. G. (Bus) Higginbotham. He was graduated from Magnolia High School in New Martinsville and from Florida Christian College in Tampa, Florida. His first located work was at Columbia Street in Fairmont, WV (1953-56). This was then followed by Wellsburg, WV (1956-58) and West Street in Weirton, WV (1958-64) and the Virginia Avenue in Chester (1964 - present). He is currently in his 40th year at Chester.

Radio preaching includes WETZ in New Martinsville, WMMN in Fairmont, WEIR in Weirton, and WOHI in East Liverpool, OH. This program is a five-day a week, fifteen-minute program that began in 1949. He was one of the speakers on a television program in Steubenville, OH over WSTV.

He has spoken on various lecture programs. (Ohio Valley College, Ohio Valley Lectures, Greater Kanawha Lectures, West Virginia School of Preaching).

He is married to the former Rose King (1954). They had three children. Donna (passed away in 1965); Janie is married to Brent Gallagher, preacher at Oakwood Road in Fairmont, WV. Steve is the preacher at South Green Street in Glasgow, KY. The Higginbotham's have seven grandchildren.

Robert Jennings, II

Robert Jennings II is the son of Robert L. and Diana A. Jennings of Grafton. He is a graduate of Grafton High School. From there he went on to receive an Elementary Education certificate from *Fairmont State College*. He completed his studies at *the West Virginia School of Preaching* in the spring of '99.

He currently works as the minister for the Wilson Ridge Church of Christ in Grafton. Not only does he work for the church, but he is also the Production Manager for the *Mountain Statesman* newspaper in Grafton, the printing company that prints the *West Virginia Christian*.

Robert is currently working with his sister, Shaunda Rauch, to open the *Majestic Eagle Christian Academy*.

Ben Jones

Ben Jones is a native of Grant Town, West Virginia. He received his early Bible instruction at the Pumpkin Center Church of Christ, Fairview, WV, where his grandfather serves as an elder.

He is a 1994 graduate of North Marion High School and a 1998 graduate of Freed-Hardeman University.

Ben is about to begin his third year as the preacher for the Kaiser and Douglas Church of Christ in Ravenswood, WV.

Terry G. Jones

Terry G. Jones was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and was raised in Toll Gate, West Virginia. He is the son of Glenn and Linda Jones. He married Melinda S. Hilvers on August 10, 1985. They now have two sons - Austin (Age 18) and Quintin (Age 15).

Terry is a 1986 graduate of East Tennessee School of Preaching in Knoxville, Tennessee. He received the A.A. and B.A. degrees from Ohio Valley College in 1996. He worked with the church in Mountain City, Tennessee, from 1986 to 1989. He then moved to Pennsboro, West Virginia, where he has been preaching to the present.

He serves as secretary on the board of directors of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and is on the faculty of West Virginia School of Preaching. In addition, he is a writer for *West Virginia Christian*. He has preached in gospel meetings and lectureships in West Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina, Indiana, and Virginia. He also has made missionary trips to the countries of Moldova and Ukraine.

Dan Kessinger

Previous biographical sketches have indicated that Dan was born in Riverview Michigan, the son of Bob and Doris Kessinger. However, it shall heretofore be reported that Dan was born south of the Mason Dixon line and prefers to stay there. He has never said "You'uns" in his life, preferring the grammatically correct (and Biblical [Ep. 4:6]) "you all." He likes Southern ballads and fiddle music, not Northern Polkas and accordions. He roots for the Dallas Cowboys, not the Detroit Lions. If there is any further doubt about whether Dan is Northern or Southern, please see him for more details. After brief boyhood stints in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Georgia, his family returned to West Virginia to stay in 1973. He and his wife, the former Mary Amy West have two boys, D.J. (10) and Thomas (5).

Dan graduated from Walton High School in Roane County, WV, and attended Ohio Valley College where he earned associate and bachelor degrees in Biblical Science.

Dan preached his first sermon in the spring of 1982 at the Mt. Zion church of Christ in Walker, WV. He has served congregations in Belle, Long Valley, Gandeeville, Proctor, and since February of 1994, the Dewey Ave. church of Christ in St. Marys.

In addition to his local work (including a weekly radio program), Dan conducts gospel meetings and appears on lecture programs each year. He is a frequent contributor to religious journals and is the author of "A Cloak of Malice." He has worked with WV Christian Youth Camp since 1984, and West Virginia School of Preaching since 1995.

Andy and Stephanie Miller

Andy and Stephanie Miller are from Fairmont, West Virginia. They attend the Norway Church of Christ, where Andy is the minister. They have four children: Drew, Brooke, Talon and Stephen.

Andy has been the full-time minister at the Norway Church of Christ for the past seven years and also drives school bus for the Marion County Board of Education. Andy also enjoys working with young people and is the coordinator of the Summer TNT program.

Stephanie has a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and is a substitute teacher for the Marion County Board of Education. However, she is currently a stay-at-home Mom and enjoys spending time with her husband and kids.

Will Montgomery

Will Montgomery was born in East Liverpool, Ohio, January 11, 1947. He was batized into Christ by Frank Higginbotham in Chester, West Virginia, in 1972. He began his preaching career while a deacon at the Chester congregation. He began located work with the East Liverpool congregation in 1981 where he continues into his 23rd year.

He has a weekly radio program, has spoken on lectureships, and has conducted 2-6 gospel meetings each year.

He is married to the former Anita Miller. They have one daughter, Tracy, who is married to John Knight. They have two grandchildren.

David R. Powell

David Powell was raised in a Christian home. His father has served as a located Gospel Preacher all of David's life. David is a graduate of *David Lipscomb College* with a BA in Communications, *Southern Christian University* with a MS in Ministry, *Carolina University of Theology* with a MA and Doctorate in Counseling/Psychology.

He is married to Rhonda (Messenger) of Michigan. He has been married for over 20 years. David and Rhonda have two children - Ashley is 19 and Nathan 17.

David has preached in located work in Virginia, Michigan, West Virginia, North Carolina, and is presently working with the Central church in Gadsden, Alabama. He has been preaching for over 20 years.

In addition to his work as a preacher, David works with the *Mental Health Association* of Etowah County. He is certified as a Marriage and Family Therapist.

Andy Robison

Andy Robison is a 1983 graduate of John Marshall High School, a 1985 graduate of Ohio Valley College, and a 1987 graduate of Harding University, with a B.A. degree in Bible and Vocal Music. He has accumulated 33 hours of graduate study from Harding Graduate School of Religion. He also attended Harding University in 1993-1994 to receive teaching certification.

Andy has worked for the Pennsboro, WV church of Christ; the Oakhurst church of Christ in Farmington, WV; the Camden Avenue church of Christ in Parkersburg, WV; and is presently with the Hopewell church of Christ in Washington, WV. He also spent two years teaching at Jackson, TN Christian School.

Andy tries to write hymns and, with the help of many others, has produced tapes and CDs for the benefit of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp.

In 1988, Andy married Marsha Giesler of Rolla, Missouri. They have two children, Hannah, age 11, and Andrew, age 8.

Melvin Salal Rogers

Melvin Salal Rogers is 33, married, and the father of three children. He is the Associate Minister at the Oakwood Road Church of Christ in Fairmont, West Virginia, and teaches the College/Young Adult Class. He is active in a campus ministry and also teaches English at Fairmont State University. He has earned a BA from the Ohio State University (1994) and MA from The

University of Akron (1998) in English Literature. Recently (2004) he has earned a 2-year certificate from the West Virginia School of Preaching. He has been teaching and preaching for close to 15 years in Ohio, West Virginia, and Texas. He is originally from Akron, Ohio.

Roger Rush

Roger Rush is a native of Fairmont, West Virginia. He has served as a minister of the Sixth & Washington Streets congregation in Marietta, Ohio, since October of 1985.

He is married to the former Diane Bond, and they have two children, Angela (27), a CPA in Columbus, Ohio, and Adam (24), who is in his third year of medical school at Ohio State University in Columbus.

Education: (B.A. & M.A.) Attended: Fairmont State College; Ohio Valley College; Lubbock Christian College; West Virginia University; Marietta College; Harding Graduate School of Religion.

Additional work experience: *Has written a weekly newspaper article for the *Marietta Times* since August 14, 1982. *Has a weekly 30 minute radio program on three stations; also been involved with TV work. *Holds 4 to 6 gospel meeting per year; has spoken on numerous lectureships. * Written for *Gospel Advocate; Power; Bible Herald, Upon the Rock; 21st Century Christian* (has had articles published in both German and Spanish magazines). *Worked with Ohio Valley Christian Youth Camp for 15 years in various capacities, including director. *Has preached in several states as well as India and Germany.

Before coming to Sixth & Washington, he served the following congregations: the Hundred church of Christ in Hundred, West Virginia; the Little Hocking church of Christ in Little Hocking, Ohio; and the Lower Paw Paw church of Christ near Lower Salem, Ohio.

Aaron Snider

Aaron has been preaching full time since August of 2000. He has worked as the associate minister for the Barrackville Church of Christ and the

Oakwood Road Church of Christ. As of June 6, 2004 is now serving as the minister for the Daybrook Church of Christ.

He attends the West Virginia School of Preaching part-time, and has a B.A. in Biblical Studies.

He is married to the former Jamie Haught of Fairview, WV and they have one daughter, Macy.

Steve Snider

Steve is a graduate of Preston Road School of Preaching. He has received a Bachelors degree from Southeastern Biblical Institute in Doraville, Georgia, and a Masters degree from Southern Christian University in Montgomery, Alabama.

He is married to Dianne Snider, and they have two children, Stephanie and Aaron.

He has done located work at Barrackville from 1977-1981, then in Alpharetta, GA from 1981-1983, and then back to Barrackville from 1983-present.

He is an Instructor at the West Virginia School Of Preaching. He has made many mission trips to India. He is co-director of Senior Week of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and is the speaker on radio program, "The Bible Way."

D. Gene West

D. Gene West is married to the former Shirley Ann Bissett. Gene and Shirley have three children: Kandi Davis, Mary Amy Kessinger, and Todd. They have six grandchildren.

Gene received an A.A. in Religious Education from Freed-Hardeman College; A.B. degrees in philosophy, religion, Spanish, and speech from West Liberty State College; and a B.S. degree in psychology from Fairmont State College.

Gene has preached for several congregations including Hundred, West Virginia; Hillview Terrace, Moundsville, West Virginia; Grand Central, Vienna, West Virginia; Oakwood Road, Fairmont, West Virginia; Steelton, New Martinsville, West Virginia; Kissimmee, Florida; and Martin's Ferry, Ohio.

He is former owner and editor of the *Bible Herald*. He taught at Ohio Valley College for five years and has taught at the West Virginia School of Preaching since its beginning in 1994.

Gene has been preaching the gospel for more than fifty years.