



Old Testament Bible Characters

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Adam and Eve

Bible Characters: Lesson 1

“Adam”: (Red, ground); “Eve”: (Life-giving).

Text: Genesis 1-4

Adam and Eve were real people and not mythical or fictional characters. The New Testament endorses their existence and the things that happened to them and what they did as described in the book of Genesis (Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:13-15).

Adam was the first man, sin did enter the world through his transgression, and the serpent deceived Eve. Kidner points out, “On its historically two things should be said. First, the New Testament assumes it and argues from it, making the first Adam as literal as the last, whose genealogy is indeed traced back to him in Luke 3:23ff. According to Romans 5:18, 19; 1 Corinthians 15:20-21, Adam was “one man”, and his sin “one trespass”, as factual as the cross and resurrection: (p. 66).

Theistic evolutionists have tried to argue that Adam and Eve were not specific individuals but that they represent an evolutionary population. Yet, the New Testament parallels Adam with Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22). If Adam was not a historical person, then what about Christ? In 1 Timothy chapter 2, Paul writes that Adam was first formed, then Eve. This verse only makes sense if Adam and Eve are specific individuals who were created by God. To suggest that they represent evolutionary populations, involves biological nonsense. It suggests that they represent evolutionary populations, involves biological nonsense. It suggests that first there was a race of males only and that after some time a race of females developed.

Lessons

- Paradise included the obligation to work (Genesis 2:15).
- God gave Adam and Eve plenty of options and freedom and His requirements were not a burden (Genesis 2:16)
- Adam and Eve were married in the garden (Genesis 2:25).
- The woman that God created was perfectly suited for the man that God made. Woman is the perfect counterpart and helper for man (Genesis 2:18)
- The serpent questions God’s wisdom and adds simply one word to God’s original command (Genesis 3:1). The devil contradicts what God had said and denies the truthfulness, wisdom and kindness of God’s expectations (Genesis 3:4). Note that the apostasy starts with questioning the goodness of God and the eventual judgment of God.
- The devil seeks to convince Eve that God is withholding something from them and that God’s rules are restrictive and unfair (Genesis 3:5). Consider the pattern of the

temptation: God's command is questioned (3:1), and then it is flatly contradicted (3:4). God is depicted as being deceitful, unreasonable, and cosmic killjoy, one who stands in the way of human fulfillment and fun (3:5). How many temptations are basically the temptation to view oneself as an equal with God and thus not accountable to His will?

- The devil purposefully never tells us all the truth about a temptations. "What the tempter did not say, however, was that their opened eyes would see all things in the light of their own wickedness and rebellion...they saw good and evil only from the standpoint of sinners, from the rock-bottom".
- The devil offers a temptation that is below what Adam and Eve already possessed. They are already like God (Genesis 3:5; 1:26-27). They already knew the difference between good and evil (3:3).
- Eve was tempted by the same things that tempt people today (Genesis 3:5; 1 John 2:15-17). Perspective is everything. The garden was full of many other trees that were good for food, but we get into trouble when we FOCUS UPON THAT ONE THING WE CAN'T HAVE. We are ripe for temptation when we have allowed ourselves to lose sight of all the blessings that God gives us on a daily basis. Kidner says, "*The pattering of sin runs right through the act, for Eve listened to a creature instead of the Creator, followed her impressions against her instructions, and made self-fulfillment her goal. This prospect of material, aesthetic and mental enrichment (6a) seemed to add up to life itself; the world still offers it (1 Jn. 2:16)*" (p. 68). How are you going to handle life if there is one thing, one goal, desire or material possession that you can never have? Will this consume you? Do you lose sight of all your other blessings at times?
- Adam said nothing, even when Eve offered him the fruit. Are we silent in the face of temptation? Do we simply go along with the crowd? God expects us to stand up and speak out (Ephesians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 16:13). Do you love God enough to obey Him even when family members do not? (Luke 14:26). God expects men to be spiritual leaders (Joshua 24:15; Genesis 18:19; Ephesians 6:4). Morris correct notes, "Many have suggested that he did this out of love for Eve, choosing to share her sin and guilt rather than leaving her to face God's judgment alone, this motive would almost make Adam appear noble in sinning, and the Bible never implies such a thing" (p. 114).
- "Here is the essence of covetousness. It is the attitude that says I need something I do not now have in order to be happy"
- One reason why we need to study and assimilate all of the word of God we can is for the purpose of withstanding temptation (Psalm 119:9, 11).
- After sinning Adam and Eve try to hide from God (3:7-10). Do people try to hide from God today and what are common places in which they attempt to hide?
- When confronted by God, Adam tries to shift the blame from his failure upon the woman God gave him. Do people blame God and others on like manner today for their failures? Smith notes, "Whatever happened to his excited 'This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh?' Now the story is, 'I never asked for her in the first place!' Sin invariably attempts to spread the blame" (p. 49).

- Even though Eve blamed the serpent who did tempt her, Adam and her are still punished. The fact that temptation exists in our world does not give us the right to yield to it.
- The first promise of the Messiah (Genesis 3:15). Compare with Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-23 and Galatians 4:1ff. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8).
- Sin affects everyone (Genesis 3:17-19). After we sin we cannot choose the consequences that of that sin nor can we limit the damage caused by sin.
- We sin today not because we inherited a sin-nature from Adam, but because like Adam and Eve we yield to temptation (Romans 5:12).
- God still continues to care for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21-24).
- This chapter explains why suffering, evil and death exist in the world. God is not to be blamed for such things.

Cain and Able

Bible Characters: Lesson 2

“Cain”: (Possessed)

“Abel”: (Breath, vapor)

In the New Testament Abel is spoken of as a man of faith (Hebrews 11:4) and the first righteous man who died for his faith (Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:51). Cain is viewed as a murderer and an evil man (1 John 3:12).

Lessons:

- It is essential that our children understand why God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's. The reason was not quantity or quality of the offering but rather Abel offered his sacrifice by faith (Hebrews 11:4) and Cain did not. Faith is not a feeling or intuition, rather faith comes by hearing God's instructions (Romans 10:17). Therefore, Abel found favor with God because he followed the God's instructions concerning what to offer. Cain on the other hand did not. We will be rejected if we do not follow what God has commanded (Matthew 7:21-23).

A number of good lessons exist in this context for us: (a) God isn't bound or obligated to accept everything that people wish to offer to Him. Just because man may call something "worship," just because some human being "thinks" that something "praises" God, doesn't mean that it does. (b) God will reject all worship that doesn't follow the guidelines of His will (Lev. 10:1-2). (c) God doesn't give any "credit" for misguided, but good intentions (1 Sam. 15). (d) Being a believer in God (which Cain was), isn't enough (John 12:42-43). (e) Faith, without obedience is vain (James 2:26). (f) Human additions or subtractions to the will of God, make our religion vain (Matthew 15:8-9). (g) True love for God has always been demonstrable by conforming to His will (John 14:15). (h) Cain's offering doesn't even get "half-credit." God either gives us an "A" or an "F", there is no middle ground. (i) God isn't impressed by "innovation" in worship. In fact, human innovation in Divine things has a very poor track record in the Scriptures (Lev. 10:1-2); 2 Samuel 6:1ff; 2 Chron. 26:16-23). (j) Anything, even the smallest details of the Will of God are a big deal to God.

- Cain offered a sacrifice but God rejected it. If we depart from God's will, God will not accept our worship (Matthew 15:9).
- Cain substituted his will, his preference for God's will and was rejected. God desires obedience and not what we may want (1 Samuel 15:22-23).
- Notice how Cain is angry. Often people are angry when they should be angry at themselves for not doing what is right. God also asks Cain a very good question, "why" (4:6). In light of our own sins, do we have a good reason to be angry with God? Who has the real right to be angry, God or Cain? Be impressed with how

God continues to pursue the sinner and attempts to reason with him (Isaiah 1:10ff).

- God gives Cain another chance to do the right thing (Genesis 4:7), but Cain is warned that if he does not repent, sin will get the better of him.
- “The added thought is that this ‘crouching beast’ is not a mild, passive thing, a tame leopard or some harmless pet. Rather, it thirsts after your blood. So the threatening character of the danger is made fully apparent to Cain, and the warning is complete” (Leupold p. 201). God doesn’t exaggerate or overstate the facts. *Sin and temptation are nothing to flirt or mess with. Walking the “line of sin” is simply like swimming in shark-infested water. Open the door of temptation and sin will “pounce” on you with a vengeance. Sin will always get the better of you. It will always cost you something, even if you eventually escape from its clutches. Consider the examples of David and the Prodigal Son. We need to learn that sin cannot be “tamed” nor can it be controlled.*
- The statement, “If you do well” (4:7) proves that Cain is not destined to fail, Cain can repent if he wants to. Do we really want to serve God?
- “Cain’s reaction to the rejection of his offering is much more severe than either of his parent’s reactions when confronted by God after their trespass. They resort to making excuses and self-exoneration, but at least they do not indulge in violence. Unable (or willing-MD), to restrain his resentment and bitterness, Cain vents his wrath on the only possible scapegoat, Able” (Hamilton p. 230). In talking to Abel it appears that Abel told Cain things that he did not want to hear. Are we willing to listen to God’s truth even when it rebukes us? (2 Timothy 4:2).
- In Cain we find many of the “classic” wrong responses when being confronted about a sin we have committed: (a) Outright denial, lying. (b) Anger directed at the good people trying to help you, finding fault with them, attacking their motives, family or character (“everyone is a hypocrite, etc.”). (c) Claiming that you are being persecuted and “singled-out.”
- Abel’s blood cried out for justice – our sins will find us out and there is no way that a person can escape God’s justice (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Cain complained that the consequences for his sin were grater than he could bear. Consider what misery the sinner brings upon him or herself. By one simple act or repentance, Cain could have went on living a happy life. The relationship with his brother Abel could have been great. Life could have been good. This tells us that we decide the level of happiness in our own lives. Every one of us is just as happy as we have decided to be. Notice how the sinner is the one who really misses out.

- When the supposedly repentant complain about god’s harshness, right there you know they really haven’t repented. Consider carefully that Cain isn’t sorry for Abel’s death, or violating the will of God and causing god pain. Or even the suffering that he has brought upon his parents! ‘This is a rather common experience in the psychology of sinners: bold impudence becomes a whining fear and complaint’ (Leupold p. 208). The one who did so much damage, now claims to be a victim!

Noah

Bible Characters: Lesson 3

“Noah”: The New Bible Dictionary states that “The etymology of the name, *noah*, is uncertain, though many commentators connect it with the root *nwh*, ‘to rest’. In Genesis (5:29) it is associated with the verb *nhm* (translated ‘comfort’ in AV and RV; ‘bring relief’ in RSV), with which it is perhaps etymologically connected; though this is not necessarily required by the text.”

A righteous man in a wicked world Noah was far distinguished from his contemporaries. Though pressured by the evils of his surrounding world Noah was able to overcome the odds and lived a life of righteousness, faithful to the almighty God (Gen. 6:9; Heb. 11:7). Because of Noah’s great faith, his exacting obedience and God’s grace Noah and his family were saved from the destruction that was pronounced upon the rest of the world. Following the destruction of the world by flood, God again replenished the earth with life using Noah and his seed to be yet another beginning to mankind, thus continuing the theme suggested by the title of this book, “Genesis,” or “Beginnings.”

Though believed by some to be a myth, a tale told to impress people, we find that from later accounts men of God considered Noah and the flood to be a factual, historical account (Isaiah 54:9; Ezekiel 14:14, 20; Matthew 24:37-39; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:18-20; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:5-6).

Lessons:

- Noah was able to remain faithful (“just”, “perfect” Gen. 6:8) even while in the midst of a wicked world. What does this say about the common reasons for fitting in with the crowd, “every body is doing it,” or “the rest of the world works like this, why shouldn’t we?”
- Noah was saved by faith which moved Him to obey God (Heb. 11:7). His faith is what drew him to “move with godly fear,” bringing salvation to his household. “By faith Noah...moved with godly fear, prepared an arch for the saving of his household.”
- Noah found grace in the eyes of God. (Gen 6:8). God’s grace was on him because he “was a just man, perfect in his generations, Noah walked with God.” (Gen. 6:9). What does this say about our having the grace of God? Must we do anything in order to find grace in the eyes of God?
- Noah preached righteousness even when there was little or no possibility that there would be any obedience on the part of those to whom he was preaching to (2 Peter 2:5 – “a preacher of righteousness”). Do we try to convert people, or do we say in our minds, “they aren’t going to change, so it’s pointless?”
- “Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him.” (Gen. 6:22; 7:5)
- God remembers His people and his promises (Gen. 8:1; Ps. 105:7, 8, 42)

- It was because of the sins of man that God destroyed the earth (Gen. 6:6, 7, 13). If the wickedness of man is reason enough for God to destroy the earth, should we not strive to be more like Noah, “perfect in (our) generation?”
- Noah was saved by water 1 Peter 3:20.
- “Many may choose to reject God, but man never gets away with it.”(Sermon “The Flood” by Dunagan) (Gen. 6:5-7)
- Aside from the preaching of Noah, life was completely normal for the people in Noah’s generation prior to the flood (Matt. 24:38). Though Noah preached on the coming destruction, it is seen that no other person in the world at that time expected, or acted upon it. The coming of Christ will be the same (1 Thess. 5:1-3). Are we expecting it?
- Contrary to popular doctrine God’s mercy only reaches out to those who live in righteousness. The statement has been made that “God is too loving of a God to destroy all the unrighteous people in the world and send them to hell.” If this statement is so then why would God save a meager 8 individuals out of an entire world of people? We must learn from this account that God is not afraid to keep His standards where they belong; He does not lower the bar because too many people are unwilling to reach for it.
- God made a covenant with all living things on the earth that He will never again destroy the earth by flood (Gen. 9:11). In 8:22 God makes the statement though that “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat...shall not cease.” Since God said, “While the earth remains,” we must conclude that there will be a time when the earth will not remain. We know that God will not destroy the earth by flood, so how will the earth be destroyed (Heb. 10:27; Zeph 1:18)? With this in mind, should we not learn from Noah’s example and prepare ourselves for a coming judgment and preach righteousness to others that all who are willing may be saved? (Heb. 10:24, 25; Col. 1:28)
- Was the flood in Noah’s day a local, or a world wide flood? Consider the following.
 - If it was a local flood, why would God command Noah saying, “And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you.”? (Gen. 6:18)
 - If it was just a local flood, why would God tell Noah gather birds into the ark? Would it not be easier for God to just have the birds fly to a different region? (Gen. 6:20)
 - Consider the language God uses when describing the destruction of the flood: “I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made” (Gen. 7:4), “The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered” (7:20), “And all flesh died that moved on the earth...and every man” (7:21), “So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground” (7:23). Surely one could not mistake this for a local flood.
 - We all know that water flows down until it becomes level. If the flood in Genesis “prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered,” for this to be a local flood, the water would have to mound up, like an egg, or a growth on the side of the earth. It would make more sense for the water to flow over the entire earth and cover “all the high mountains every under the heavens,” just as the scriptures say?

Abraham - 1

Bible Characters: Lesson 4

Genesis 12-16

“Abram, Abraham”: The New Bible Dictionary states that “The etymology of the name

Abram (used Gen. 11:26-17:4 and rarely elsewhere e.g. 1 Ch. 1:27; Ne. 9:7) is uncertain. It probably means ‘the father is exalted’ and is a typical specific early W Semitic personal name form of Ab(i)ram. After the covenant of Gn. 17:5 his name is changed to Abraham and explained as ‘father of a multitude’ of nations.”

“Sarai, Sarah”: The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states that “The former

name appears to be derived from the same root as Israel, if, indeed, Gen. 32:28 is intended as an etymology of Israel. ‘She that strives.’ In the verse following the one where this name is conferred, it is declared of Sarah that ‘kings of peoples shall be of her’ (Gen. 17:16)”. The New Bible Dictionary briefly describes it however as “(Heb. *Sarah*, ‘princess”).”

Abraham’s story is one of faith, promises, patience, and fulfillment. Like Noah, Abraham was chosen by God to be the father of His people, a new beginning in the world. As the chapters unfold in the book of Genesis we see how God takes one righteous man and his family, makes a covenant with him, and from his seed creates a nation that would, in the end, produce a savior for the world. Though this plan seems grand indeed, the first half of Abraham’s life was not so grand. Seeing Abraham (then Abram) to be a righteous man God called him out of his country, away from his family, to be a “sojourner and a pilgrim” in a land that was not yet his own (Gen. 12:1). In Abram’s obedience we see what would become the true foundation for God’s people – faith (Gen. 12:4; Heb. 11:8; Rom. 4:9).

Through his journeys we see Abram and his family struggle with famine, the unrighteousness of man, and their own sins. Like all men Abram does sin, but like very few men, in Abram we see a humble heart of repentance which, with time, strengthens his relationship with God.

As descendants of Abraham (by faith) there is much we can learn in holding Abraham’s life as a pattern for our own, for we too are “sojourners and pilgrims” in this world.

Lessons:

- God is our “shield, (our) exceedingly great reward.” (Gen. 15:1)
- Abraham was faithful to obey the Lord even when there was reason for much doubt. (Gen. 12:1-4; Heb. 11:8)
- God found Abraham’s heart faithful to Him (Neh. 9:7-8). Will God find your heart faithful to Him?
- Righteousness is based on our faith and trust in God (Jas. 2:23; Gen. 15:6). When we are faithful and righteous as Abraham was, we too can be called the friends of God.

- Contrary to the belief held by those who cling to the law of the flesh (the Law of Moses) a person becomes a son, or the seed of Abraham not by practicing the Law of Moses, but by holding to the same faith that Abraham had, that is in Christ, in obedience to the word of God. (Matt. 3:9, 10) Today, we become sons of Abraham by faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-29).
- When times are uncertain and persecution seems eminent does our faith hold strong, or do we feel the need to compensate for fear that God will not be there for us? (Gen. 12:10-20).
- Truly we can see the pitfalls of human wisdom in how going beyond what God has said causes more problems than it solves (Gen. 12, 16)
- When the temptation for “quick and easy” gain arises, do we choose the Lord, or do we choose physical wealth? (Gen. 14:14-24).
- God is a just God, but He is just as merciful. Using human reasoning, many people have come to belief that, either God did not command the Israelites to conquer and kill all those nations in the book of Joshua, or, if God did command it “He is a cruel and merciless God.” But in God’s making Abraham to wait before he inherits the land of the Amorites we see God’s mercy in that He did not destroy these people before their iniquity was “complete.” That is, without enough provocation. (Gen. 15:16)
- God does not accept all forms of worship as most popular religious leaders would suggest today. We learn from Josh 24:2-3 that Abraham’s family worshiped other gods. Would Abraham’s faith have been “accounted to him as righteousness” if he had continued worshiping these false gods while following after the Lord God at the same time? No. Rather we see Abraham abandoning the false religions of his family in order to serve the One, True God.
- There are many positive and negative commands that God has placed in the Scriptures that are similar to what he asked of Abraham. It makes no sense to many today that we should:
 - ✓ Baptize for the remission of sins.
 - ✓ Practice discipline.
 - ✓ Refrain from the use of instrumental music.
 - ✓ Practice church autonomy.
 - ✓ Dress Speak and be entertained – modestly and with sobriety.
 - ✓ Cleanse ourselves from the world: Dancing, Drinking, Gambling.

Abraham was a man that pleased God. He was a man that God put up on a pedestal and asked us to be like him. The battles we face may be different, but the courage, faith and dedication to the Lord will not be. Once we understand this point, we will never look at Abraham’s life the same again. (Hitchen, “Our Father Abraham”)

Abraham Part 2

Bible Characters: Lesson 5

Genesis 17-25:11

“Isaac”: “Laughter (i.e. mockery); *Jitschak* (or Isaac), son of Abraham: - Isaac” also “He will laugh; *Jischak*, the heir of Abraham: - Isaac.” (Strong’s) (Gen. 21:6)

As we continue Abraham’s trek through the land which God had promised to Him we find his life growing full. Through his journeys we see Abraham’s faith grow as well as his physical wealth and blessings. But as we read through the remaining chapters of Abraham’s life one cannot help but notice that the focus of Abraham’s greatness is not on his physical well being, but his spiritual. Though there are portions of scripture that describe Abraham’s wealth (Gen. 23:6; 24:35) the focus of the text leans heavily on the promises and blessings God gives to Abraham concerning God’s people (Gen. 17:6-9). More specifically we find several times where God restates His promise of blessing all nations through Abraham’s seed (continuing the messianic prophecies which began in Gen. 3:15). Though Abraham’s life draws to a close in Genesis 24-25 we see that God’s righteous men are not easily forgotten (Gen. 26:4, 5; 26:24; Heb. 11)

Though Abraham’s life is not a perfect one (he still commits sin even after attaining great promises from God [Gen. 20:9, 10]), we see several characteristics in his life that are clearly seen in all faithful men who have followed in his footsteps: faith in God, humility, repentance.

Lessons:

- Gen. 17:1 – If we want to be a child of God we must “*walk before God and be blameless.*” Even when His commands may not make sense to us (Gen. 22:1-13).
- Gen. 18:14 – “*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” See also Jer. 32:17.
- Rom. 4:18-22 – “*not being weak in faith...he did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God.*” This is the real heart of the life we are to understand that Abraham lived and the life that we are to live ourselves. There was absolutely no doubt, he was the perfect example of “*let God be true but every man a liar*” (Rom. 3:4), and Eph. 3:20-21.
- Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:6-9). If we are of faith, then we are sons of God (like Abraham), but how do we become sons of God through faith? (Ga. 3:26-29).
- Abraham is the father of the circumcision (the Jews) and the uncircumcision (Gentiles), but only if they “*walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had.*” The promise was then offered to all men. Both to those who were of the law (physical seed/if spiritually related also) and of “those who are of the faith of Abraham.” (Rom. 4:16-17)

- There can be little doubt after looking at all these Scriptures that God intends for all Christians to view Abraham in exactly the same way that the Jews did. He is the father of our nation. Every one of us who has been baptized into Christ and trusts in Jesus Christ is of the seed of Abraham. With this in mind let us now consider Isa. 51:1-2. “*Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the Lord...*”
- When God made an impossible promise Abraham believe, will you? (Rom. 4:17-25)
- When God made an impossible demand Abraham fulfilled it, could you? (James 2:21-24)
- Though Abraham is dead, he is alive (Luke 20:37, 38). We can have life after death if we live faithful to God.
- There is a belief that “Jesus could not start His kingdom when He came the first time because the people would not accept Him, so He died on the cross and now we are waiting for Him to come back to start His kingdom.” If this is true then the gospel is nothing but a myth and we are still dead in our sins. But the apostle Paul teaches us that the gospel of Christ was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), and that gospel required Christ to die on the cross (Gal. 3:13-14). So the gospel was fulfilled.
- Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ (John 8:56), Just like Moses and all the other faithful men of the Old Testament (Heb. 11). They lived by faith in the fact that God was sending a Savior for their souls. Do we rejoice in the fact that that Savior has come, and that now, if we obey, we can rejoice with all the saints both dead and alive?

Lot

Bible Characters: Lesson 6

“Lot”: (Heb. lot, ‘covering’?). The son of Haran, Abraham’s brother, and so Abraham’s nephew. Apart from the account of his life in Genesis, his name is absent from the OT (except for references to his descendants in Deut. 2:9, 19; Ps. 83:8), but he is mentioned by our Lord in Luke. 17:28-32 and also by Peter in 2 Pet. 2:7f.

According to the book of Genesis, like our father Abraham, Lot’s story consists of two parts, both showing two very different spectrums of his life. We are introduced to Lot in the same passages that we are introduced to Abraham. Being the nephew of Abraham Lot had the opportunity to follow him out of the influence of idolatry and into the Promised Land to be a “pilgrim and a sojourner.” Both of these men became wealthy during their travels and their herds grew in size creating some dissention between the two families. As a solution to this problem Lot and Abram agreed to go their separate ways and to choose separate lands on which to dwell with all of their belongings.

It is at this pivotal moment that we see the spiritual and moral well being of these two individuals begin to differ drastically. Like most young men, Lot chose to go for “higher ground,” “better pastures,” and “greener grass.” Drawn by visual and physical enticements, Lot made his choice while seemingly blind to the evident moral and spiritual danger he was putting himself in. It is because of this fatal decision that we see Lot’s life start a slow, but sure, tailspin until finally toward the end of his life he hits rock bottom. Let us learn from the decisions that Lot made in his life.

Genesis 11:27, 31; 12:4-14:16

Genesis 19

Lessons:

- Lot had so much in his favor.
 - ✓ Good influence of godly relatives (Gen. 12:4, 5; Heb. 11:8-10)
 - ✓ God had blessed him with wealth (Gen. 13:5, 6; Jas. 1:17).
 - ✓ He was a righteous man (2 Peter. 2:7, 8).
 - ✓ He was hospitable (Gen. 19:1-3; Heb. 13:3).But Lot made one decision which proved to be the ruin of his life. (Gen. 13:7-13). Let us consider the decisions we make and not follow after Lot.
- Lot’s decision reflected bad attitudes.
 - ✓ He was selfish (what about young people who disregard the heartache of godly parents and the damage to their influence to indulge their own fleshly lusts?) (Phi. 2:4).
 - ✓ He was disrespectful (Gen. 12:5, 7)
 - ✓ His decision was made purely for carnal rather than spiritual reasons (Rom. 8:5-8)

- Lot's decision started a series of steps (unforeseen by him) which caused his downfall (Ps. 1:1) ("Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan")
 - ✓ "Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan" (Gen. 13:11).
 - ✓ "Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain" (Gen. 13:12).
 - ✓ "Lot pitched his tent as far as Sodom" (Gen. 13:12).
- Lot reaped the wages of sin (Gal. 6:7, 8; Rom. 6:23).
 - ✓ Lot was "vexed" by the wickedness of the Sodomites (2 Peter. 2:7, 8).
 - ✓ His own moral standard had become confused (Gen. 19:1-8).
 - ✓ Lot lost everything the meant anything to him (Gen. 19:9-30)
 - ✓ His own faith and righteousness had weakened (Gen. 19:30, 33, 35)
 - ✓ His remaining daughters were ruined morally (Gen. 19:31-38).
 - ✓ His descendants, through these incestuous, adulterous relationships, were the inveterate enemies of God's people (Deut. 23:3-6).
- Lot was "vexed" by the wickedness of the Sodomites (2 Peter 2:7, 8)

Are we vexed when we see the sin in the world, or do we choose to join them, to fit in? Though Lot had made his fair share of mistakes we still see a glimmer of righteousness in him.
- God always shows care and concern for righteous people (Gen. 19:12-24)
- A righteous father may not always be able to counteract a sinful environment for his children (Gen. 18:20; 19:30-36)
- If we get too close to sin – people may not take our warnings seriously (Gen. 19:14)
- Lot stood up against sin, but it was too late for his family (Gen. 19:9)
- Lot might have thought that the inhabitants of Sodom respected him, but they only tolerated him, up to the point that he exposed their sins (Gen. 19:7-9)
- Despite his shortcomings, Lot was a hospitable man (Gen. 19:1-3; Heb. 13:2) "He knew the city in which he lived! He was looking out for the best interests of his fellowman, even if such were mere stranger." (Dunagan)
- Lot tried to protect his guests, even when in danger himself (Gen. 19:4-9).
- Lot "hesitated" (Gen. 19:16). Why? "Lot shows that he had been affected by his environment, a little bit of Sodom had crept into him. Kidner notes, "The grip 'of this present evil world', even on those who love it with a bad conscience, is powerfully shown in this last-minute struggle...The warning to 'remember lot's wife' (Luke 17:32) gives us reason to see ourselves potentially in the lingering, quibbling Lot himself, wheeling a last concession as he is dragged to safety. Not even brimstone will make a pilgrim of him" (p. 135). Note, God mercifully grabs and yanks him out!" (Dunagan)
- Gen. 19:12-14 – Lot's sons-in-law show themselves to be men to very little character. "They responded as do many who , upon hearing of God's final judgment, nock and deride them very possibility of such an event" (Davis p. 202) (2 Peter. 3:4)

Isaac

Bible Characters: Lesson 7

“Isaac”: “Laughter” (Gen. 21:3, 6)

Text: Genesis 17:15-21; 18:9-15; 21:1-35:29

The promise that began with Abraham is now carried on through his “only begotten son” Isaac. Though Abraham did have more than one, we must note that the first was one brought about by human reasoning. The second, however, was brought about by the power and faithfulness of God to fulfill His promises. And so, the focus of the book of Genesis turns now from the life of Abraham to that of his promised son, Isaac. Unlike his father, we find Isaac living a more stationary life, only traveling when needed, yet remaining in the land which the Lord had promised to his father. We find that Isaac grows to be a very devout and good man, much like his father, but sometimes righteousness isn’t enough to raise faithful children. Initially having two sons, Isaac and Rebecca (his first wife) each begin to favor one of the sons, a favoritism that would bring blind judgment on Isaac’s part, and much grief to the family. But, the Lord’s will be done, the younger of the two sons, Jacob, will become heir to God’s promises and become the Father of what is intended to be a great nation.

Lessons:

- Isaac was the child of promise that God promised to Abraham, through whom a great nation would come (Gen. 17:16, 19), and through whom would come the seed by whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). Abraham had another son, Ishmael, who was not promised by God, but was rather the child of a bond woman by means of human wisdom (Gen. 16:1-12). Notice how The Holy Spirit compares these two children in Gal. 4:21-31 to the Old and the New Covenants.
 - According to Paul, people who try to make the Old Law binding today are making themselves sons of the bond woman (remember that her son was the fruit of human wisdom and of servitude, not freedom).
 - But those who follow only after the law of Christ, or the New Law, these are sons of the free woman, that is sons of promise, those who are blessed by the seed of Abraham, who is the promised Christ (Gal. 3:15-18)
 - Whose child do you want to be, the free, or the servant?
- Gen. 26:12-16, 27, 28. At times, the people of the world can be very envious of God’s people because of the blessings that God gives them. What are some of the blessing that God gives his people today that those in the world would be jealous of?
 - Jude 24;
 - Eph. 1:3; Rom. 15:29
 - John 16:33; Heb. 13:20, 21
 - John 8:34-36; Gal. 5:1; 1 John. 3:3

- When the Philistines saw all the ways in which God blessed Isaac they were very jealous of him and began to persecute him (Gen. 26:14, 15). Do we find this same thing happening today?
- Matt. 5:11
 - 2 Tim. 3:12
 - What are we to do when we are in the situation that Isaac was in? Matt. 5:44; Rom. 12:14.
- Gen. 26:34. Even though a man is righteous, he can still have unrighteous children. Isaac clearly understood the importance of monogamy in marriage and to see his oldest son have multiple wives grieve him deeply. It is also possible that, like his father, Isaac saw the importance of his boys to take a wife from a family not of the land of Canaan (Gen. 24:2-8), that is, not being unequally yoked (2 Cor. 6:14).
 - Gen. 22:6, 9. Isaac shows great submission both to his father and to the will of God. We know that Isaac was old enough to know how to offer a sacrifice (Gen. 22:7). We see then that like Abraham, Isaac trusted in the Lord and was willing to submit to His will. Are we willing to serve God with our lives?
 - Gen. 24:63. Isaac shows a characteristic that is dominant in all those who are faithful, meditation. It is easy to go through life without taking the time to think, ponder, and meditate on all that God has given to us and revealed to us. But it is good for us to learn from Isaac's example. (Ps. 119:97-99; Ps. 143:5; 1 Timothy 4:15).
 - Gen. 26:20-22. Isaac exemplifies what it is to live peaceably with all men (Rom. 12:8). When you are in Isaac's situation, how do you react? Will you become bitter and spiteful toward people who treat you badly and take advantage of you, or will you put your faith in God? How can we possibly live peaceably with people who treat us badly? Remember who you are and where you are going (Heb. 10:32-35 – “...*joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods.*”)
 - Gen. 26:25. In Isaac we see true devotion and desire to worship the living God. As is characteristic of God's faithful followers, Isaac did not seek to “get out of” or remove his obligation to worship God. He rather worshiped God wherever he was calling on the name of the Lord.
 - Heb. 11:20 – Isaac put his faith in God.
 - Gen. 31:53. Isaac had a great reverence for God (“fear” is also defined “reverence”). When you walk through life what do you hold as valuable? That is, when people think of you, will they remember you for your fear and reverence for God? Remember, “Holy and reverend is His name” (Ps. 111:9).
 - Gen. 26:7-10. In spite of all of his great strengths, Isaac had a few weaknesses as well. We find that he had a fear of men. Some may say that “it is OK to lie if it will save your life or somebody else's life.” What do we learn about who we are to fear and the value of honesty in this passage? (Gen. 26:7; 31:42, 53; 1 Pet. 2:17; Rev. 21:8)
 - It is amazing when one sits down and compares the many similarities between the promised son (Isaac) and the promised seed (Jesus Christ). Here are a few similarities to ponder over.

1. In 2 Chronicles chapter 2, King Solomon began making preparations to build a palace for himself, and a temple for God. Chapter 3 opens by telling us where the temple was built, *“Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah”* (2 Chronicles 3:1). Abraham was instructed to sacrifice Isaac in Moriah, and we find that Mount Moriah is in Jerusalem. This calls to mind another sacrifice which was made in Jerusalem roughly two thousand years later: the sacrifice of Christ.
2. Remember that, although Abraham’s firstborn son was Ishmael, God referred to Isaac as his only son. This expression emphasizes Isaac’s preeminence; remember that it was Isaac through whom God would bring about His promises to Abraham, and so Isaac was the one and only son of promise. Now, consider John. 3:16, *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”* Here the same expression is used to express Jesus’ preeminence among God’s children: Jesus is the One through whom God ultimately fulfilled His greatest promises to Abraham and accomplished His plan of salvation for all mankind; and Jesus is the One who most perfectly displayed the image of God in which Adam was created. So, both Jesus and Isaac were preeminent among their respective fathers’ children to such an extent that both are referred to as only sons.
3. God had also made a point of the fact that Abraham loved Isaac. Likewise, He made a similar point regarding Jesus at His baptism, *“And behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased’”* (Matthew 3:17). It is interesting that God specifically pointed out this fact in each case. And, it is interesting that both Matthew and Moses included this one detail in both accounts.
4. Abraham fully intended to kill his son at God’s command, and so far as he was concerned, Isaac was as good as dead until he got to the mountain and the angel spoke from heaven, which was on the third day from when God had issued the command. Similarly, consider the length of time Jesus was among the dead, *“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”* (1 Cor. 15:3, 4). So, just as Isaac was as good as dead until the third day, so also Christ was in the grave until the third day from His crucifixion.
5. Again, remember that Isaac bore the wood for the burnt offering. Likewise, Jesus bore the cross, *“They took Jesus therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha”* (John 19:17). Therefore, just as Isaac carried the wood upon which he was to be burned, so also Jesus carried the wooden cross upon which He was to be hung. Gen. 25:28; 26:34-27:46. Often when something in this life brings favor to us it is hard to part with it. Such is the case with Isaac and his eldest son, Esau. Isaac knew that God intended to make of his descendants a holy nation who would walk upright before the Lord. As we see from this text, Esau was not a man who could likely be a father of this type of nation. Though Esau brought grief upon the family, Esau was Isaac’s favorite, and as such, in his eyes was deserving of a great blessing. But if we read what God said at their birth (Gen. 25:23) God had other plans. How often do we try to change, or ignore the will of God because of the things that we value in our lives? It is important for us to remember to look beyond what makes us feel good and try to make decisions, and judgments based on what is right in the sight of God. *“Thy will be done.”*

Jacob and Esau

Bible Characters: Lesson 8

“Jacob”: “Heel Catcher”; the second son of Jacob. The name was given on account of his taking hold of his older brother’s heel while coming out of the womb at birth. (Gen. 25:26).

“Esau”: “Hairy”; Son of Isaac, twin brother of Jacob. The name was given on account of the hair covering on his body at birth. (Gen. 25:25)

Text: Genesis 25-50

Here we find the second generation after Abraham and again the promises of Abraham that have been passed down to Isaac are now being passed down to his son, Jacob. Though Isaac had two sons it is evident in the story that only one is chosen by God to carry the promise of the Messiah. Though deception played a big part in Jacob’s attaining the blessing of his father we will find that it was to be at great expense. However, throughout Jacob’s life we find this practice (of deceiving) to be an ongoing struggle, one that was not to be mastered until later on in his life. But, as we read of Jacob’s growth in his devotion and faith in God, we will find his character becoming more and more like that of his grandfather and father’s. Because of Jacob’s faith God renames him giving him a name that should never be forgotten, one that would be the title of an entire nation - Israel. Esau’s story, on the other hand, is not so triumphant. First giving up his birthright, then going against the principals of his father by marrying foreign women, then allowing the deceit of his brother to build up rage and anger and bitterness within him, indeed the life of Esau is not one that God has chosen for his people to model after. However God has not left Esau desolate, he is a child of Isaac after all. But, in the end we will find God’s blessing the faithful, for as it says, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.” (Mal. 1:2, 3)

Lessons:

- Gen. 25:29-34. Notice Esau’s willingness to give up his entire birth right for a mere morsel of food. Compare this to the attitude that Jesus had in Mathew 4:2-4. We can see Esau’s lack of faith in his impatient desire for food, to have his physical hunger satisfied. Esau was willing to give up his birth right (or as the scriptures states, he “despised his birthright”) for some food, instead of putting his trust in God to take care of Him. But as Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” What do we value more, our physical needs, or our spiritual needs? “Jacob is ruthless here, Esau is fickle, careless and in New Testament language, ‘immoral and godless’ (Heb. 12:16).” (Dunagan)
- Gen. 26:34, 35. Here is a terrific lesson for considering our spouses wisely. Isaac new of the importance of not being “unequally yoked” with the people of the land in which he was living. This was a principle that his father Abraham instilled in him when choosing a wife for him (Gen. 24:1-9). It is possible too that they understood the importance of monogamy in marriage and so Esau’s decision would there again bring much grief. In this decision we see again Esau’s lack of faith in God, his disrespect for

righteousness, and his desire for the things of this world. We also learn that other people are greatly affected by our decisions in life.

- Gen. 27:5-30. “While God doesn’t approve of lying or deception, God will allow Rebekah and Jacob to have success in their plot, because it will further His purpose. But, both Jacob and Rebekah will pay a price. Jacob, the home-body will be forced to leave home and it appears that Rebekah will never again see her son” (Dunagan). Sometimes we may think we are doing the right thing, but it is important to always consider both the nature of our actions, and the possible repercussions of them.
- Isaac placed too much importance on his physical senses (27:4). Isaac’s frivolity became his greatest weakness: his plate had long since governed his heart (25:28) and silenced his tongue (for he was powerless to rebuke the sin that was Esau’s down fall)” (Kidner p. 156).
- Gen. 27:38. Esau finally realizes what he forfeited – but it is too late (Heb. 12:17). There are certain things that sorrow and remorse cannot reverse; there are times when repentance can’t change the circumstances. Many people on the judgment day will be like Esau, very remorseful – but to no avail. (Dunagan).
- Gen. 27:41. How often when we are wrong do we become angry and spiteful to those who prove us so? Esau demonstrates his unfitness to be the heir to God’s people. Instead of mourning over his own foolishness, in his mind everything was Jacob’s fault. Remember that God’s people are to be humble and penitent.
- Even in these ancient days people understood the principal behind capital punishment and the responsibility/condemnation of a man for taking another man’s life. (Gen. 9:6; 27:41).
- Gen. 31:7. Though people deceive us and misuse us, God does not allow His people to be hurt.
- Luke 1:26-35. Many people are familiar with the nation of Israel that came out of Egypt, whose fathers were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and whose mediator was Moses. In the days that the people who were under the Law of Moses there was a physical Israel, or in terms of the passage at hand, “house of Jacob.” Now, that physical house of Jacob no longer exists, but there is still a house of Jacob. Why? This nation of Israel was considered God’s holy people, His own nation. But, now that Jesus Christ has come and died on the cross, everything that the physical nation looked forward to was fulfilled in Christ, and now there is a spiritual house of Jacob, whose mediator is Christ. We are still called the house of Jacob because we are now the “chosen people of God.” (see also 1 Pet. 2:1-10; Rom. 9:6-13)
- We read in Malachi 1:2 that God loved Jacob and hated Esau. Why is this so? Jacob is such a deceiver yet God preferred him over Esau. Does this man that it is God’s Sovereignty to choose who He wants to bless more and who He blesses less? Yet, we also know that God does not practice favoritism. The expression “Esau I hated” does not intend to suggest that God held some form of malice against Esau or that He held him in contempt. Neither does “Jacob I loved” suggest that God loved the sins of Jacob (any more than John 3:16 means that God loves the sins of the world because He loves

the world). God has the right to choose who He will use to accomplish His purposes here on earth, and on one occasion He chose Jacob rather than Esau. Romans. 9:8-13 explains that God's choice was made before they were born, so it had nothing to do with their "good or evil," but everything to do with God's sovereign right to choose (elect) who He would use to accomplish His purposes (cf. Rom. 9:11). Since the choice being discussed did not involve Jacob and Esau's condition of goodness or evil, the text is not discussing their eternal salvation, only that God made a choice of one (Jacob, along with his descendants) and not the other (Esau and his descendants) to fulfill the divine purposes of God (Messiah, etc).

Joseph

Bible Characters: Lesson 9

“Joseph”: “He will add.”

Text: Gen. 30:22-24; 35:23-26; 37:1-36; 39:1-50:26

Living a life of hardship, irony, and blessings, Joseph has become one of the great examples of what great faith looks like. As his father's favorite son he became the object of envy and jealousy to his brothers. He was then sold into captivity, a life which at that point in time, would seem cruel and unfair for a young man of Joseph's character. But the Lord knows those who are His, and His hand is not waxed short. Indeed, whenever Joseph faced trials, the Lord was there, for where one might see doom, God had made opportunity. God was able to give Joseph a life long lesson that many people today never seem to understand, “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Rom. 8:28). We see in Joseph's faith, righteousness, and pure devotion to do the will of God that He truly loved the Lord. Having waited over twenty years after his brothers sold him into slavery to finally meet up with them again, we see Joseph's great faith shine forth in the lack of hatred toward his brothers. Where most people would have spent that time building up bitterness, hatred and, if in Joseph's position, wrath, Joseph contented himself to know that the past twenty years were not the work of men, but God (Gen. 50:20). Having been joined again with his family and allowed to prosper in the land of Egypt, we see Joseph's faith last all the way to his death, where he gives orders for his remains to be buried in the promised Land.

Lessons:

- Gen. 37:3-11: Joseph was hated and unappreciated by his brothers much like God's people are hated and unappreciated by the world today. But we learn a lesson from Joseph in that though the world may hate us, God is with us blessing us each step of the way.
- Gen. 37:6-9: God causes great things to happen through ordinary men.
- Gen. 37:12-17; 37:2-11: Joseph was trustworthy. When his father sent him on an errand he would not go home until he found his brothers when they were not where Jacob said they would be. Joseph pursued his brothers so that he may fulfill his task. He told the truth, even when the truth hurt, when he told his family of his dreams. See also 2 Tim. 4:2, “out of season.”
- Gen. 39:2-23: Joseph did not allow the Egyptians to “despise his youth” (1 Tim. 2:12). Joseph lived godly while among strangers in a strange land with many temptations.
- Gen. 39:4-15: Joseph did not use certain freedoms as opportunities for evil. At times when we know we find favor in our employer's eyes, we tend to be more lax with our duties, take more advantage of that trust. Joseph did not do this. He held his

responsibility with great respect for God and for his employer. Children at times do this with their parents when they know their parents won't discipline them right after they do something wrong. We need to learn the importance of not seeing how far we can get without getting in trouble, "straddling the line."

- Joseph did not give up when the going got tuff. He did not use hardship ("unfairness") as an excuse to sin (situation ethics). He didn't have self-pity.
- Gen. 39:9: Joseph called sin for what it was. "How can I do this great evil (wickedness) against my God?" He did not try to soften the sin with vague words, nor did he find excuses to sin.
- Gen. 39:11, 12: Joseph fled from sin just as we are to "flee from youthful lusts." With temptation God always provides a way for escape, we need to do like Joseph and take it (1 Cor. 10:13).
- Gen. 39:19, 20: Joseph stood up for righteousness, though he was persecuted for it without cause (thrown in prison for no wrong).
- All can be lost or won in a moment. Joseph was second highest in Potiphar's household, but by that evening he was in prison. We never know what will happen to us, nor when. All we know is that like Joseph, we must trust in God.
- Joseph kept his faith and his integrity, even when he was away from home.
- Gen. 40:1-9; 41:14-16: Joseph was humble. He did not take credit for God allowing him to interpret dreams.
- Gen. 39:4: Joseph's respect for his position was not out of trying to please men, but out of his fear of God. We should not be discouraged from respecting out teachers, leaders, and authorities just because other people look down on it as accuse us of "sucking up" (he found favor in Potiphar's sight).
- Gen. 37:12-36; 45:1-15; 50:15-21: Joseph did not use power and opportunity to take revenge on his brothers. Instead he acted in love.
- Gen. 49:22-26; Deut. 33:13-17: Goodness is seen and blessed by God.
- Gen. 50:24-26; Heb. 11:22: Even in death Joseph showed his faith in God and in His promises
- Gen. 50:20: People treat us badly, persecute us and revile us. At times we don't know why. But we must always remember Rom. 8:28. "All things work together for the good of them that love the Lord." Joseph knew this and because of this we can see why he did not lose his faith through all of his hardships and persecutions. "You meant it for evil, but the Lord meant it for good."
- God took care of Joseph without forcing other people to change.
- We can see God's providential working behind the scenes without forcing people to do things against their will.
- There is a good possibility that Egypt would have perished if Joseph had not suffered and been sent into Egypt.

Moses – 1

Bible Characters: Lesson 10

“Moses”: “Drawn out,” “born” (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

As one baby in a land that has come to despise new born boys of his generation, Moses was born. To some Moses may have seemed to be an ordinary child, but to his parents and to God Moses was not so ordinary. Being saved by the great faith of his parents and the hand of the Lord, this special child went from living with the Hebrew slaves to living with Pharaoh's daughter where he would grow to be mighty in the wisdom and knowledge of Egypt. But Moses was not one to let this all go to his head, for he was found faithful both to his own people and to God. This man, once a child with almost no hope, becomes one of the greatest men in the history of God's people. He becomes the deliverer of God's people from slavery, and the only law giver up until Christ. Through the story of Moses we see him overcoming fears, fighting against the stubborn will of the people of Israel, and struggling to lead God's chosen nation. Though the life of Moses has its ups and downs (like all people of God) there is much we can learn from him both in matters of faith, and of righteousness.

Text: Exodus 1-18

Lessons:

- Ex. 2:1-7; Heb. 11:24: Moses was saved by his parents because they had faith and were not afraid of Pharaoh's command. When people command us or try to persuade us to do ungodly things do we hold strong to our faith?
- Ex. 2:11; Heb. 11:24: Moses valued God and His people greater than he valued all the riches of Egypt. He did not allow worldly things to draw him away from God. He was not selfish in that, though he had opportunity to be wealthy beyond measure, he chose instead to be counted equal with his brethren. We see this same characteristic in God's people in Acts 2-4.
- Ex. 2:10; Acts 7:21, 22: Moses did not allow human wisdom and philosophy to corrupt the simple truth of God's word. He was “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,” (remember that the Egyptians had a god for almost every element in nature) yet Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. When studying God's word it is good to remember this and to test all things to see if it is human wisdom, or God's wisdom. (1 Tim. 6:20)
- Heb. 11:24-26: “By faith Moses...esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure of Egypt.” Moses did not cling to the wealth, comfort, and physical blessings of Egypt because he saw the “reproach” of Christ as being worth more than that. This is a good lesson to keep in mind when we are forced to move from one home to another, when forced to take sides on an issue, or just stand up for the truth. In all things that we do, we need to look to the reward we have in Christ and view it as more important than anything else in life (Phil. 3:8).

- Heb. 11:27: Like his parents Moses did not fear any man over God. Not even Pharaoh, who at that time would have been one of the most powerful men in the world. Rather, he feared God and obeyed His will at all costs (Eccl. 12:13, 14; Deut. 6:2; Deut. 10:12).
- Ex. 2:23-25; 3:7: God does not leave His people desolate, nor does He forget them. At times God's people may be called to suffer, even without cause (like Christ), but we must have faith that God is not far away. Knowing this, we will be better equipped to endure the hardships of this life because like Moses, we can look forward to our reward in heaven. God "knows our sorrows."
- Ex. 3:1-6: Moses, though curious, did not disrespect God, but rather feared God and treated Him with reverence when in His presence. Every time we read a passage from the scriptures we are reading the word of God, the same word that was spoken to man many years ago. It would be wise to follow after Moses' example to fear God while drawing near to Him and while reading or hearing His spoken word. (Eccl. 5:1)
- Ex. 3:13, 14; 4:1: Notice Moses' carefulness when learning the commands of God. He made sure that He would speak to the people exactly as God would want him to. We too need to be as cautious when speaking the word of God, for we are to speak as the Oracles of God.(1 Peter 4:11)
- Ex. 4:10-17: Though Moses was meek (which we find to be a good characteristic [Matt. 5]), we find that God expects a certain level of faith to be found in those who proclaim His word. We learn a good lesson from the Lord's rebuke, that when we are speaking His words to others we do not need to be "eloquent of speech," but rather be willing to speak the word of God with boldness. God does not look lightly on the cowardly as we see with his reaction to Moses in verse 14. Also in Revelation 21:8 the cowardly are listed with the most dominant sinners. Like Jesus, we must be willing, and able, to speak God's word with what it is, authority.
- Ex. 4:24-26: Even the great Moses fell short on some points of obedience. For the command of God was to circumcise each male child of the lineage of Abraham on the eighth day (Gen. 17:10-14), a task that Moses passed over. Let us learn from this that God expects his people to do exactly as He commands us, and He does not play favorites. Even the greatest of men are to keep the smallest of commands. (Numbers 20:1ff)
- Ex. 7:1, 2: It is interesting to note that God said that Moses would be "as God" to Pharaoh, to whom Moses would speak "the word of God." This is one of the most important points we must learn in reading and obeying the commands written in the Bible. This same principal that applied to Moses applied to all the apostles and prophets in the New Testament who spoke the word of God as Moses did. That word, though spoken by men, is from God and therefore is just as authoritative as if God was speaking to us face to face.
- Ex. 14:12-15: When times seem to be hard and we become afraid of dangers around us, where do you put your faith? Israel had no faith under these circumstances (vs. 12), but Moses is confident with faith (vs. 13, 14).

Moses - 2

Bible Characters: Lesson 11

Text: Exodus 18-40

Having successfully delivered Israel out of the bondage of the Egyptians by the mighty hand of God, Moses has now become deliverer, law giver, and judge. One cannot help but notice the great similarities that Moses' position among God's people has with that of Christ's, who is our deliverer, law giver and judge. Moses' position is one that holds great responsibilities, obligations and dangers. Like most who preach the truth, Moses was ridiculed by the people to whom he preached. There were those who became jealous of his position seeking power and honor for themselves. But through it all Moses did not become puffed up, nor did he become proud. Moses was one that held his responsibility with great respect, humility and meekness. At one point did Moses show a hint of arrogance, but at the rebuke of the Lord we find a quick end to that. As an example and a pattern for us, Moses led a life faithful to God. Though he was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land because of his moment of weakness (Numbers 20:8-12), Moses remained faithful to the end. He was a man of God; he was the friend of God.

Lessons:

- Ex. 7:20; 8:17; Num. 20:11: Notice a pattern that Moses followed with smiting the object from which God would bring forth the miracle. It is interesting to note that in the first two passages God commanded Moses to strike these objects, but in the third (Num. 20:11) God did not command Moses to strike the rock. Notice also how Moses takes credit for the miracle, instead of giving God the glory. Here we have two seemingly small actions, but to God they are great acts of disobedience. One, Moses went beyond the word of the Lord, and two, he did not give God the glory.
- Ex. 24:12; Deut. 4:44; 31:9, 24-27; John. 1:17: Moses was law giver. Just as Jesus gives us the Law of the Lord, Moses gave the Israelites the law of the Lord. Many people have used this as an excuse to continue to follow the Law of Moses. In light of such a belief, we must consider carefully John. 1:17 and what that means for us in reference to the Law of Moses verses the Law of Christ (Eph. 2:14-16; Gal. 3:10-14).
- Ex. 25:40; Ex. 39:42, 43; 40:16; Num. 15:32-36: Not only does the life of Moses show us how we are to respect our law giver, but He also shows us how we are to respect the law itself. This is a good one for both young people and for parents. Though Moses was the law giver for Israel, he still did "all that the Lord commanded him." Thus, Moses is the Law giver, and a law follower.
- Deut. 18:15-22; John 1:45; Luke 24:27: There are those today who do not believe that the Christ has come and that we are still under the Law of Moses. Though Moses was a prophet and a law giver, he was not jealous, nor was he greedy of his position, but he looked forward to a greater prophet and law giver who would take his place (Heb. 11:23). This prophet the Moses prophesied of is Christ (Acts 3:22-26). It is a wonder that those

people who claim to follow the Law of Moses are breaking the Law of Moses by not obeying the words of Christ, who is this exalted prophet, and Son of God.

- Num. 11:10-15: Even the great Moses was willing to lean on the Lord for help in leading the people. This should be the pattern for all those who hold responsibility. We cannot do it alone; we need the Lord's help.
- Num. 11:1-10, 16-20: God does not take lightly to complaining. Many people are hungry, or do not have everything that they would like to have. But we ought never to consider abandoning the Lord because we think we don't have everything that we need. The Lord knows our state; He has not left us deserted. Therefore beware if you get the urge to complain about what the Lord has given you, you may be sorry (1 Cor. 10:10).
- Num. 11:31-34: So many people leave their brains at home and think only with their stomach. Remember that this was one of the weaknesses of Isaac. This is also a weakness that we ought to watch out for. When we let our stomach control our actions, we can no longer reason in our minds as a faithful servant of God.
- Num. 11:18-23: Sometimes God tells us to do things or He says things will happen that are hard for us to understand. People often make the mistake of questioning God just because they cannot yet see the reasoning behind his judgments. A good habit to get in is one of trusting completely in God's promises and in his power. The Lord's hand is not shortened.
- Num. 12: Often when we do not like the decisions of our leaders we are tempted to "dig up dirt on them." In the early 1900's President Roosevelt called those types of people and news papers, "mud-slingers." Miriam and Aaron tried their hand at "mud-slinging," being puffed up at the authority at which Moses held. We see here that the Lord does not look lightly at those who would stoop to such a level. As an example to all God was as a Father to Miriam who "spit in her face" (so to speak) because of the dishonorable way in which she acted (cf. Vs. 10, 14, 15). Let us not act in this manner.
- Num. 13-14: A lack of faith is one prominent characteristic we see in the nation of Israel. Second is an abundance of disobedience. In these two chapters we see the fruits of both. In chapter thirteen God sends in spies to the land of Canaan so that they may see how great the land is that they are about to take. But the majority of the spies that go into that land let their lack of faith rule their hearts and their actions. In doing so they were as "leaven" to the rest of the people in that they spread their disbelief throughout all of the people. Because of their disbelief God punishes the people by sentencing them to 40 years of wondering in the wilderness (14:26-35). Torn between their lack of faith and the fear of God's punishment, the people are once again disobedient to the Lord. As a disobedient child who tries to do what they are told after they hear what their punishment will be, so Israel was. This passage proves to be a great help in understanding Hebrews 12 and Prov. 3:11-13. Israel "fainted" at the chastening of the Lord, and drew back into rebellion.
- Num. 21:4-9: At times God commands His people to do things that may not make too much sense to them. We must realize that the only people who are going to be saved by God's commands are those who are willing to do them no matter how much sense they

may make to us. This is a good lesson to consider when thinking about and discussing baptism.

- Deut. 4:1-14: When preaching and teaching God's word we have more responsibility than just telling people what the bible says. Like Moses, we need to command obedience to what God says as well.
- Deut. 6:1-9: The word of God is not something that should be taken lightly. It is what we live by, it is what saves us. It is what should be on our minds at all times.
- Deut. 11; 30:11-15: God rewards all people. But it is up to us to decide which reward we want depending on what we do with His word.

Joshua

Bible Characters: Lesson 12

“Joshua”: “Joshua...was called by his family *hosea*, ‘salvation’, Num. 13:8. Moses added the divine name, and called him ‘*yehosua*’, normally rendered in Eng. ‘Joshua’.”

Text: Numbers 13-14; Joshua

Joshua’s Background: Ex. 17:9-14; 24:13; 32:17-18; 33:11; Num. 13:8, 16

In short Joshua’s life can be described as one of courage, faith, devotion and leadership. As Moses’ successor Joshua had no small responsibility resting on his shoulders. But as God’s most faithful servants always do, Joshua rose to the occasion and served God faithfully unto his death. Throughout Joshua’s life we see what it means to be both a great servant (he was the assistant of Moses), and we see how that humility transitions in to great leadership. This is an account that many would do well to look back upon and learn what real leadership is. Joshua feared no one but God, never doubting, never flinching; Joshua stood firm under the mighty hand of God.

Lessons

- Ex. 17:8-14: Joshua did as he was commanded even though it may have not made very much sense at that time. He was willing to fight Amaleck knowing that the Lord would be with him, but who would have thought that all Moses had to do was to hold his hands up in the air in order for the battle to be won by Joshua? But as we see in the actions of Aaron and Hur as they held Moses’ hands in the air with the faith that in doing so they would without a doubt win the battle.
- Ex. 24:13; 33:11: Even when all of Israel was too afraid to have the Lord speak directly to them (Ex. 20:18-21), Joshua’s faith was not so weak. As Moses’ assistant Joshua was willing to stand by his side as he went up and came down from the Mountain.
- Num. 13:30-14:10: Once again Joshua’s faith stands out amongst the people of Israel as he and Caleb are the only ones who put their faith in the power of the Lord. The faith of the other spies wavered so greatly that they were willing to lie about what they had seen and feared it. Joshua was not so weak. He was willing to speak the truth and to keep his faith, even when in danger of being stoned for it. Are we as willing to stand for the truth?
- Josh. 1:1-10: The Lord did not have to tell Joshua something twice before he believed it. How often when we are given a task or a responsibility of some sort do we have to be reminded to get the job done? After Moses’ death the Lord spoke to Joshua, then after that Joshua went straight up and “commanded the officers of the people.” This provides a great illustration for “*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ*” (Col. 3:23, 24).

- Deut. 1:37, 38; 3:28: Training people to be servants of God is not just rebuking and chastening, but encouragement, nurturing, patience and instruction as well. This is the type of training that Moses gave Joshua; this is the type of training that all of God's people need.
- Num. 27:12-23: Because of Joshua's faith, devotion, and his love for God, Joshua was chosen by God to be Moses' successor. When the time comes, will God be able to choose you to do His work, or even to lead His people?
- Josh. 7:6-9: Though he was a great leader, Joshua was not too proud to humble himself before the Lord to ask for help. Is God the first one we turn to for help when we are in need of it?
- Deut. 34:9; Josh. 4:14; 24:31: Joshua was able to gain the confidence and support of the people of Israel. We must note though that he did not have to seek the pleasure of men in order to do so. As a leader to God's people Joshua was mighty in the Lord, not in his own wisdom. Let this be a lesson for us as we go through life. Whether we are in a position of leadership, or just simply an average Joe, we must be strong in the Lord if we are to be exalted by Him (Josh. 4:14).
- Josh. 1:2-9; 5:13; 24:14-15: If it is one thing that stands out in the life of Joshua, it is "success" linked with courage and obedience. Where most people would faint at the thought of doing and saying what Joshua did in order to provoke Israel to obedience, Joshua feared only God and did all that was commanded of him, and nothing less. What kind of courage do we have?
- Josh. 23; 24:16-25: Joshua challenged the people to greater faithfulness. What does this say to the modern philosophy of "political correctness." It is always appropriate to be courteous to other people, but when the commands of the Lord must be met and people need to be challenged to meet them, it is time to set our personal feelings aside and submit to the Lord. Joshua understood this and he did not worry about hurting the people's feelings. "The Lord's will be done." His will is more important than our feelings.
- God blesses those who are faithful (as He did Joshua)
- "Obedient faith is a saving faith." After reading Joshua 1:1-9, it is perfectly clear what Joshua had to do, but God would not have blessed him unless he did exactly what was commanded him.
- God's leaders are to trust in the Lord.
- God's leaders are to be respected (both among God's people and apart from God's people). 1 Peter. 2:13; Tit. 3:1, 2; Col. 1:16-18
- Faith is the victory.
- Josh 9: Be careful with whom you make a covenant with. They might be your enemy.
- Josh. 10:8-27: Joshua understood, and had faith in the great power of God to do all things.

- An interesting point to keep in mind concerning Jericho is that its destruction can be used as a proof of the divine nature of the bible.
 - “Archaeologists also determined that the walls of the city collapsed. They were not broken by some kind of battering ram, they *fell down*. Here, of course, is a part of the scriptural account with which many are familiar: *"And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat."* (Joshua 6:20)
 - Finally, after destroying the city with the sword, the Israelites burned the city and all that was in it with fire (6:24). This again is consistent with the archaeologists' findings which indicate that after the walls fell down, the city was burned.
 - So then, we see that in point after point, the archaeology of the city of Jericho agrees perfectly with scripture.” (Biblical Archeology Review, March, 1990)

Gideon

Bible Characters: Lesson 13

“Gideon”: “A cutting down”; “great warrior”

“Jerubbaal”: “Let Baal plead” (Judges 6:31, 32).

Text: Judges 6-8

One of the more popular Judges in Israel’s history, Gideon was very successful in his deliverance of God’s people from the Midianites. Though he was timid to begin with, we see Gideon’s faith increase more and more as he observes the power of God at work. Having his faith built up Gideon boldly carries out the commands of God. Even when faced with opposition from his brethren Gideon is firm and confident that he is doing the work of God. He does not waver under this opposition. As his task of delivering Israel from their enemies draws to an end however we see this strong faith in God begin to waver. Like many before and after him, Gideon allowed physical objects interfere with his devotion to God. As Gideon’s life draws to an end it is evident that it is not a pleasant ending. The people are again drawn away from the Lord, and one of Gideon’s own sons steps into the picture attempting to set himself up as the type of leader that Gideon was so adamantly against. In spite of his downfalls, however, there are many valuable lessons to be learned from the life of Gideon.

Lessons:

- Judges 6:14-16; 7:7-25: God does great things with seemingly small means. Time and time again God has commanded men to do things that, according to the wisdom of men, would be equivalent to suicide. The story of Gideon is one such incident. God has chosen 300 men (7:7) whom He would send into the midst of an army consisting of over 135,000 men (7:12; 8:12). Some might expect Gideon and his three hundred men to react as the spies did in Numbers 13-14, But Gideon’s faith stood firm (6:21-24). Even in the midst of unlikely odds (4500 to 1). Will our faith hold firm when we are expected to do things that might seem hard for us? (6:16 – the Lord is with us).
- Judges 6:12-14: There are times when the people of God feel a sense of despair, almost as if God had deserted them. We see this feeling in Gideon. Though it is not wrong to have this feeling, we should never use our “despair” as an opportunity to curse or to turn away from God (as Job’s wife opted to do). Let us rather use it as an opportunity to lean on God and trust in Him (Rom. 8:28; Heb. 12).
- Judges 6:25-28: It is not enough that we just remove our sins and our worldly practices when we repent, God expects us to replace the evil with the godly (Matt. 12:43; 2 Peter. 2:18-22). Once we remove the bad, if we do not replace it with good, then the bad will come back worse than it was before (Matt. 12:43-45).

- Judges 6:28-32: When we see other people doing the right things do we stand up with them in their righteousness, or are we among the wicked who would rather ridicule and persecute them?
- Judges 6:27: There are times that we are afraid of men when we are expected to obey the commands of the Lord. Some people are not baptized because they fear their parents or their friends. Some people sin while on the job because they would rather sin than get fired. Others keep quiet when something must be said about the evil practices of others. Are you among those who let fear keep you from obeying God, or do you find ways to overcome your fear in order to obey the commands of the Lord?
- Judges 6:36-40: Some see this passage as Gideon “testing God.” Let us understand that this is not the “testing” that Jesus rebuked when tempted by Satan in Matthew chapter 4. It is wrong to purposefully put God in a situation in order to see if He will prove Himself to be true. However it is not wrong to test what is spoken to us to see if it is truly from God (Gal. 1:8, 9; 1 John 4:1; Acts 17:10, 11).
- Gideon did exactly as God commanded him to do both with choosing his army and with executing His attack. In this we can see the success of those who follow God’s commands exactly as He gives them.
- Judges 7:9-15: God never leaves us without the hope of a reward.
- Judges 8:1-3: There are those who will be angry at us, even when we do what is right. This is why we must always “be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in us.” Like Gideon (vs. 2, 3) we must understand why we do what we do and be able to answer people who question what we do (Col. 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:15). We can also see the importance of using God’s word to give an answer for what we do.
- Judges 8:4-17: How charitable are we when others ask us for help? This is one of those stories that we see the value of “doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.” We also see the penalty for allowing our fear to get in the way of doing what is right (Jas. 4:17; Heb. 13:2).
- Judges 8:24-27: Here we find a situation where God had not commanded that the “ephod” or image be made, and where the people put more value in the image than in the power that delivered them from the Midianites. We need to be careful when start putting great value in physical things or they will become stumbling blocks to us. We must always remember that God has all power and that the physical things of this life (crosses, statues, pictures, etc.) will, in the end, be burned up by that power.

Samson

Bible Characters: Lesson 14

“Samson”: “Distinguished, strong”

Text: Judges 13-16

The story of Samson is an interesting one. Similar to Isaac’s wife, Rachel, God had blest the parents of Samson who were not able to have children prior to Samson’s birth. Born for a specific reason and a specific purpose Samson grew to be a man of great strength by the power of God. Though Samson’s life takes several turns for the worst, the reader cannot help but notice that in every situation God is able to use Samson to carry out his will; that is, to deliver the Israelites from the hands of the Philistines. We see Samson struggling with his own weaknesses and at times he lives to regret his actions. Unlike many people, Samson was able to use the chastening of the Lord as discipline, rather than reason for anger against God (Heb. 12). At the end of Samson’s life he is humbled and humiliated. By this Samson learned several things. 1. He cannot get through this life relying only on his own strength; he must rely on the Lord. 2. God has no use for arrogance, but desire that men be humble before him. It is comforting to know that Samson’s faith did not let him down. Where many would have abandoned God being in Samson situation (when he was in bondage to the Philistines), Samson kept his faith and was added to God’s list of faithful heroes in Hebrews 11.

Lessons:

- Judges 13:1-5: God had a specific plan and a specific purpose for Samson. It is interesting to note that because of this Samson was expected to live a specific manner of life. Christians need to realize that they are in the same situation as Samson was. When we are born again into Christ we are born for a specific reason and into a specific manner of life. Just as the “Nazirite” was expected to keep himself pure and undefiled (Leviticus 11) Christians are expected to do the same. It is not a burden for us to keep ourselves “meet for the Master’s use” (2 Tim. 2:21), but rather a privilege.
- Judges 13:5: Samson was a Nazirite, set aside for the Lord’s use (Numbers 6). Those who are in the church today are “separated” for the Lord’s use, we have been sanctified, made holy (1 Cor. 6:10, 11; Eph. 1:4; 2 Cor. 6:16-18). Let us learn to keep our “vow” to follow the Lord and keep our selves holy before him.
- Judges 13:8: Manoah prayed to God that He would teach them what they should do. Are we doing the same?
- Judges 13:8, 9: God is listening to our prayers, if we ask in faith (1 John 5:14).
- Judges 13:15, 16: Samson’s father, Manoah, shows us the importance of hospitality (Heb. 13:2). We too should learn to not be begrudging with our hospitality and generosity towards others (Heb. 13:16).

- Judges 13:19-23; Gen. 32:30; Judges 6:22, 23: To see an angel of the Lord face to face is not a matter to be taken lightly. Only those who show true reverence and respect to the Lord and to His messengers may see His face and live. We know that God does not appear to us in this manner today, nonetheless, our awe, reverence and respect for God should not be any less than those who have seen His angels face to face (Lev. 10:3).
- Judges 13:24, 25: The Lord blesses those who do exactly as He commands.
- Judges 14:1-4: Sometimes God brings about circumstances that we may not see as good or useful, but we must always remember that God is in control. God is able to use all circumstances to bring about His will, whether negative or positive.
- Judges 14:5-9; Lev. 11:24-28: At times Samson shows a sense of looseness when it comes to following God's laws. Later on we find that Samson lives to regret this (Judges. 16:4-24). We must remember that the commands of God are not to be taken lightly. Though Samson sinned in this way one must not overlook the fact that he learned from his mistakes, was humbled, and repented of his sins (Judges 16:28-30). Sin is not without consequence.
- Judges 14:12-18; 16:15-21: Men have many weaknesses and are enticed by many things. Some men are enticed by food (like Isaac in Gen. 27) some by the beauty of a woman (Judah in Gen. 38). In Samson we find both a lack of patience and endurance, and weakness when it comes to the enticements of a woman. We need to learn what our weaknesses are and strive to overcome them. Satan takes every advantage he can get to cause us to stumble (2 Cor. 2:11), just as the women whom Samson "loved" did to him. We must be ready.
- From the two passages above we also see the importance of not being unequally yoked (2 Cor. 6:14). Beauty can be good, but we must always remember that the schemes of a person's heart are often hidden by their physical beauty. We must consider this when choosing who we are going to trust and who we will eventually marry.
- Judges 14:12-20: It is no wonder gambling is a sin.
- Judges 15:1-17: Some may be tempted to use this passage as an excuse to take revenge on their enemies. Before we can draw a conclusion on this matter however one must remember that Samson was chosen by God to be a Judge for Israel (Judges 13:5). As a judge his job was to deliver Israel from the hands of their enemies (Judges 2:16). During the time of Samson the enemies that were against Israel were the Philistines. Thus, this so called "revenge" that Samson is taking upon the Philistines is not his own, but it is the will of God in order to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines. This passage does not condone revenge for it is written, "*Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord*" (Rom. 12:19). Samson was set aside to bring the Lord's vengeance upon the Philistines. Today vengeance is stored up for Christ who is our judge, not us (2 Thess. 1:3-8; Heb. 10:30).

- Judges 15:7-15: We need to examine ourselves against the word of God to make sure that we are not struggling against those who are actually doing the will of the Lord. Many times people get angry at preachers who preach against immodesty, dancing, drinking, marriage divorce and remarriage, saying that they are being destructive in the church. Remember that the children of Judah in this passage were angry with Samson because they thought that he was being destructive to their people, when in reality he was carrying out the will of God. Whose will are we struggling to fulfill?
- Judges 15:18, 19: At times when we are in need of physical nourishment or care we tend to get upset at God and accuse Him of not taking care of us. We see Sampson doing this in this passage. It is good to notice however that though man acts irrationally at times, God is patient with us and does not fail to take care of us. This passage however does not give us the right to be angry at God, no matter how bad our condition, God is never in the wrong (Jonah 4:6-10).

Ruth and Boaz

Bible Characters: Lesson 15

“Ruth”: “Friendship”

“Boaz”: “Strength is in him”

Text: The Book of Ruth

When we read the story of Ruth we read of a woman full of devotion, and loyalty. For Christians who are converted and begin to live a life faithful to God, Ruth is an example that we should ponder every day. Not only was she willing to give up her former life, leave her family and those things that were most familiar to her, but she was willing to live her life in a way that glorified God in all that she did. As a light shining in Bethlehem this poor woman became known by all the people in that town as a virtuous and honorable woman (Ruth 3:11). Just as in the stories of Joseph and Abraham Ruth’s godliness brought her great things. By her life we see that God blesses those who put others before their own lives. God brings honor to those who give honor to others. When we read the beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5, we read of the character of Ruth.

Lessons:

- Ruth is a foreigner who found the true God.
- Consider the importance the God placed upon a single Moabite woman.
- Ruth 1: One must never underestimate the power of relationships to turn people to the Lord. If we live godly in this present age among men our own lives can be one of the greatest tools we can use to bring people to God. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8)
- Ruth 2:2, 17, 18: We must be willing to work, not only to take care of ourselves, but to take care of others as well.
- Ruth 2:4: Such a greeting should not be uncommon among God’s people. If we have faith in God and a sincere love for the brethren (1 Peter 1:22) then our greeting of our brethren will be as Boaz’s was toward his workers (1 Thess. 5:26; Titus 3:15; 1 Peter 5:14; 3 John 14).
- Ruth 2:8, 9: Whether men are rich or poor we should always be willing to help them to the best of our ability, without being judgmental of their physical conditions. Christ died for us on the cross, the least we could do is show kindness and impartiality toward others, especial to those who are our brethren.
- Ruth 2:10: When others show kindness to us we need to be humble and grateful for their kindness.
- Ruth 2:12: Indeed the Lord does reward those who are willing to come under His wing (Ps. 36:7-9; Ps. 61:4, 5)

- Ruth 2:14-16: Boaz shows us what it is to be generous toward others. Many people are content to give as little as possible to aid their brethren and none at all if they can keep from it. But when we put on Christ, it is to put on great generosity, for Christ gave His life. How much are we willing to give? (2 Cor. 9:6-9)
- Ruth 2:14, 18: It is always good to think of how we can help others when we are blessed.
- Ruth 3:1-3: It is in human nature to “clean up” and to put on our best garments when presenting ourselves before people as a sign of respect. We do this with weddings, funerals, and other such “formal” events. God is worthy of more honor and respect than all of glorious things on this earth. Ruth put on her best garments in order to impress Boaz. How much more important is it that we have respect and a desire to impress the Lord God?
- Ruth 3:5-11: Good things come to those who seek after goodness and righteousness rather than the physical pleasures of this world (vs. 10).
- Ruth 3:11: Even people as lowly as a servant can have a great reputation among the people. We must never underestimate the influence we have on other people, whether we are great or small.
- Ruth 3:12-18; 4:1-12: There are times that we would like to have something, but are not quite sure if we will get it. Most people are willing to lie and scheme deceptions in order to have what they want, but Boaz was not so. He wanted Ruth very much, but he knew that there was another man that had priority to take her in if that man so desired. Boaz did not lie, nor did he conceal the matter. As we all should do, he honorably addressed the matter just as God had commanded in the law of God. His honesty and righteousness paid off (4:10-12).
- Ruth 4:13-22: It is amazing how God can use such a great turn of events to do great things for the world. Ruth, though humble and insignificant in her own eyes went from being a daughter in the land of the Moabites, to being a daughter in Jerusalem, to being the ancestor of the Savior of the world (Ruth 4:17; Luke 3:23-32).

Hannah and Eli

Bible Characters: Lesson 16

“Hannah”: “Grace”

“Eli”: “The Lord is uplifting”

Text: 1 Samuel 1-4:18

There is much to learn in the lives of Hannah and Eli, though their story is short. There is seen in Hannah the benefit of having faith in God and having patience when under persecution from others. From Eli we see the importance of not becoming lax in our service toward God, and in our hunger and thirst for righteousness. Our own devotion should be spent not only serving the Lord, but teaching others to do the same. As the story goes, the interaction between Hannah and Eli, and the awesome grace and mercy of God, bring about a man of God who will grow to be mighty in word and in deed – The Prophet Samuel.

Lessons:

- 1 Sam. 1:1, 2, 6: We see yet another example of why God does not allow polygamy. Hannah and Peninnah were rivals, and domestic discontent reigned in the house of Elkanah.
- 1 Sam. 2:2: Consider Hannah's praise of God: *"No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God."* Apply this truth concerning God to the many sins that men justify today using situation ethics. If God is such a great rock (which He is) why would He allow men to lie in one circumstance, but not lie in a different circumstance? Why would God allow a man to commit fornication in one circumstance, but not in different circumstance? What about stealing if we are starving? God is an immovable rock that does not change with circumstance, but when we justify our sin because of the circumstances we are in, then He is no longer our rock.
- 1 Sam. 1:9-13: How did Hannah pray? With her heart not her mouth? This is good to remember when we bring our petitions to the Lord. It is one thing to pray because we must and just say things to get the prayer over with (vain repetition as Jesus would call it, Matt. 6:7-8). Like Hannah we need to pray with our heart and with faith (James 5:15).
- 1 Sam. 1:12-18: It is a wondrous thing when our souls can be grieved to despair but when we pray to God we are no longer sad. There are those who, though they pray, their worries, anxieties, and grievances still bear a heavy load on them. It is good to consider the faith that Hannah had in the power of God when praying, and the comfort that that gave her.
- 1 Sam. 1:9-12, 18: There are many who will dare to “barter with God in their prayers.” That is, “God, if you do something for me then I will never do this again.” Many times people will find themselves making promises to God in their prayers that they cannot keep, but they believe they are justified to make those promises because Hannah did in

this passage. It is important to note that Hannah did not make a vow that she could not keep. Hanna did not give the Lord a condition (say that she would stop doing a specific sin only if God gave her a son). What Hanna did was similar to that of the parents of Samson (Judges 13:6-8). She merely assured the Lord that if He was willing to give her a son, then she would give that child to the Lord for His service. She kept her vow (1 Sam. 1:24-28).

- 1 Sam. 2:1-10: Do we praise God when great things happen in our lives?
- 1 Sam. 2:12-17: The attitude of the leaders can greatly affect the attitude of the people of God (and a congregation). When the leaders are corrupt and misuse their power the people will either be corrupt, or they will “abhor the offering of the Lord.” This is good to consider. For whatever roll of leadership we hold, we must learn to hold it with honor and dignity, not selfishness.
- 1 Sam. 2:18: Even children can do the Lord’s work if they are willing.
- 1 Sam. 2:19-21: The Lord blesses those who hold true to Him. Hannah asked for a child and in keeping with her vow since that child was given to her, the Lord blessed her abundantly giving her five more children besides Samuel. Though times seem often drear, hold true to the Lord for He holds true to you (1 Peter 1:3).
- 1 Sam. 2:22-25: Eli's sin was so serious that it caused God to condemn his house forever. What was so terrible that God would do this? "*His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*" (1 Samuel 3:13). Eli did not discipline his sons and teach them righteousness. Their conduct was so offensive that worshipers began to hold the Lord's sacrifice in contempt (1 Samuel 2:17). This proves to be a good lesson not only for parents to discipline their children properly, but for children as well. Consider how you act as a youth, it will have great repercussions when you have grown.
- 1 Sam. 2:23-25; 3:11-14: Despite the popular philosophy of our culture today, to discipline a person required more than just a stern talking to. Psychologists will say that parents should not spank their children because it will give them a complex. People will say that we should not speak too harshly against other people when we think they are wrong because you might offend them. The unfaithful will say that the church should not discipline those members who are unruly. But what does God say in this passage? Did Eli not give his sons a “stern talking to” (2:23-25)? When talking is done and people refuse to repent, God teaches us that action must be taken whether in the family, in the church, or in society in general (1 Sam. 3:13).
- 1 Sam. 3:9: Just as Samuel, children must be taught how to address both God and other men with respect.
- 1 Sam. 3:18: If it is one thing that we learn from Eli, it is that “The Lord’s will be done.” Though it did not take his punishment away, Eli proves to be honorable in this passage by accepting the discipline of God without question.

Samuel

Bible Characters: Lesson 17

“Samuel”: “Heard of God” or “Asked of God”

Text: 1 Samuel 1-28

References: Ps. 99:6; Jer. 15:1; Acts 3:24; Acts 13:20.

Born into the service of the Lord Samuel was one who “grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men” (1 Sam. 2:26). Respected by both God and men Samuel grew to be a priest, a judge, and seer (prophet). As the final judge over God’s people it was upon Samuel’s shoulders that the responsibility stood to appoint the first king of Israel. Fearing no man, trusting wholly in the Lord Samuel wholeheartedly carried out his duty before the Lord. We see Samuel’s love and care for the will of God in how He carries out God’s commands exactly as they were given (1 Sam. 12:14; 13:9-14; 15:19-23). Though Samuel was a wise and godly man, there was still room for growth even in old age (1 Sam. 16:7). The first king of Israel rebelled against the Lord, an event both tasking and grievous for Samuel (1 Sam. 15:35-16:1). Samuel loved the Lord so much however that the Lord’s will had great preeminence over his own as it was once again upon Samuel to anoint a new king. In the end, Samuel remained faithful to God all the days his life. A great man, a humble and faithful servant (Heb. 11:32).

Lessons:

- Ps. 99:6: Samuel was among those who called upon the Lord and the Lord answered him. Will we strive to be like Samuel and call on the Lord God all the days of our lives?
- 1 Sam. 2:18: Even children can do the Lord’s work if they are willing.
- 1 Sam. 2:18; 3:1: Let us take note that it is never too early for young people to devote themselves to the service of the Lord. The wisdom of the world would say about young people “They’re just kids, let them alone so they can have fun.” There is nothing wrong with having fun as a youth (Eccl. 11:9). Young people should be taught to enjoy their youth with out squandering it in sin. Love God and fulfill your responsibility toward Him.
- 1 Sam. 1:11: Samuel was devoted as a holy servant of God.
- 1 Sam. 2:26; Heb. 11:32: Samuel was both faithful to God and favored by God and men.
- 1 Sam. 2:26; Luke 2:52: It is interesting that the same phrase for growing in stature and in favor with God and men is used for both Samuel and Jesus. Most Christians understand that Jesus is to be our example. It is also important for children to have Jesus as their example while growing up. Samuel, one of the Lord’s most faithful servants, conducted himself as a child in the same way that Jesus did, so should children today.
- 1 Sam. 3:18: Samuel was truthful.
- 1 Sam. 9:6: Samuel was honorable.

- 1 Sam. 15:10-33: Samuel was courageous.
- Psa. 99:6: Samuel was humble.
- 1 Sam. 7:3: One must “prepare their heart” to serve the Lord. Like the Jews, we must “prepare our hearts” to be willing to give up all that we desire in this world, and turn our desire to God. Having done thus, we will be able to serve Him wholeheartedly.
- 1 Sam. 7:8-10: When we are afraid or in need we must “never cease to cry out to the Lord our God.” When we put all of our faith in God, we can be assured that He will do what is best for us.
- 1 Sam. 7:12: Samuel set up a memorial stone that the people may remember the help that the Lord had given them. Let us consider the meaning of the stone and not the stone itself as the world most often does (not making an idol out of it). Remembering the kindness of the Lord is something that we should do every day, for He blessed us every day of our lives.
- 1 Sam. 7:15-8:3: Though some children grow to be ungodly people, their parents are not always to blame. The parents are responsible for raising godly children, but children need to remember, when you grow up your parents are no longer responsible for you.
- 1 Sam. 8:4-7: Too often the Lord’s people refuse to hold to God’s pattern or way of doing things because they want to be more like the rest of the world. Many congregations have gone off into apostasy because they want to be popular like the denominations. Many Christians are bringing worldly teaching into the church because they want to have fun rather than be edified. We must notice from this passage that God is not pleased when His people abandon His pattern for that of the world. Like Samuel, we must love the Lord to the point that when we see people not follow the word of God, it grieves our hearts.
- 1 Sam. 8:7-9: When we are unwilling to listen to people who show us our sins we are not rejecting them, we are rejecting the Lord. When we show other people their sins and they refuse to listen, they are not rejecting us, they are rejecting the Lord. It is ever important therefore that we be willing to listen to those who reprove and rebuke us, and we be willing to reprove and rebuke others who are in sin. (2 Tim. 4:2).
- 1 Sam. 12:1-5: Like Samuel, we should always strive to be blameless in all that we do (1 Cor. 1:8).
- 1 Sam. 12:6: Let us always reason concerning all the righteous acts of the Lord.
- 1 Sam. 12:14, 15: Most people today desire to be blessed by God and want joy and happiness all the days of their lives, but do not think that they should have to obey God in order to have it. They see the type of blessings that are mentioned in verse 14, but are unwilling to see the obligation that goes along with it. Let us consider both our obligation from verse 14, and the warning in verse 15. If we heed the warnings and fulfill our obligation, then and only then will we be given the blessings of God.

- 1 Sam. 12:20-25: Even when we have done wrong we must not be so cowardly as to turn away from the Lord. He is forgiving and merciful if we are humble and penitent. When we sin we must strive ever more to overcome the world and remain faithful to God.
- 1 Sam. 15:19-23: Often men get “good ideas” that they think will better their worship or service to God. Consider Samuel. He was not blinded by the vain reasoning of men. He was able to see through human reasoning and discern the will of the Lord. “To obey is better than sacrifice.” As we offer up service to the Lord throughout our lives, let us “examine all things,” to see if they are from man or from God.
- 1 Sam. 15:35; 16:1: There are times when the Lord commands us to withdraw ourselves from unruly brethren (2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Tim. 6:5). The Lord has given such commandments for a reason. Like Samuel we need to trust in God, even when it may seem grievous or unfair in our own minds.
- 1 Sam. 16:1-3: We must remember that the leaders of this world were given their power by God; we must therefore submit to them. But, there are times when those leaders stand in the way of our obedience to God. In such cases we must be willing to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).
- 1 Sam. 16:7: “The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

King Saul

Bible Characters: Lesson 18

“Saul”: “Asked”

Text: 1 Samuel 8-31; 1 Chronicles 10

A sad time in the history of Israel was the day they demanded a king. God’s own people proved their lack of faith in Him. Desirous of being like the other nations, they demanded that an earthly king rule over them in the place of the one true King - God (1 Sam. 8:4-6; 10:17-19; 12:12). And so, King Saul enters the picture. A tall, handsome, valiant looking man, and humble; surely he would be a great king over Israel (1 Sam. 9:1, 2, 21)! Yet we learn very quickly that it is not the outward appearance of a man that proves his worth (1 Sam. 10:20-22; 16:7). Saul indeed begins his reign as a great king, zealous for the Lord (1 Sam. 11). But, his glory and faithful obedience would be short lived (1 Sam. 13:1-15). Filled with his desire to please men and himself Saul’s heart was soon turned away from the Lord (1 Sam. 13:9-14; 15:18-22; 16:14). For the remaining years of his sad reign as King, Saul’s spiritual condition declined as his greed, envy and hatred increased. In the end, Saul reaped what he sowed (1 Sam. 31; 1 Chron. 10).

Lessons:

- 1 Sam. 9:2 – Looks and physical stature are not everything (1 Sam. 15:23).
- 1 Sam. 9:14-17 – God is the one who gives rulers and leaders their authority (Rom. 13:1).
- 1 Sam. 14:24-46: No matter how passionate we are about something we need to remember to have wisdom in the decisions we make. Saul was passionate about his pursuit of the Philistines, but in his passion he made a foolish and rash vow. In his anger against the Philistines he would make sure that no man from Israel would eat until his enemies were vanquished. Little did he know that the consequences of this vow would threaten the life of his own son (vs. 27, 28, 43, 44). Remember to ponder the consequences of our actions, for they may be our undoing (Eccl. 5:4-6).
- 1 Sam. 15:1-23: God expects obedience from His people. Sometime we think that we are helping the Lord when we get good ideas and want to use them in teaching, worship, or whatever service we do. No matter what we do we must examine all things to make certain that we are not sacrificing our obedience for our own pleasures, as Saul did here. We learn this same lesson from Cain in Gen. 4:3-7. We must strive to do well that we may be accepted. “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22).
- 1 Sam. 15:24-28: We must be prepared to face the consequences of our actions. The Lord has promised that He will forgive us of our sins when we repent and ask for forgiveness, but He has always assured us that there will be physical consequences that cannot be taken away. Saul was not willing to accept this. Because of his stubbornness the kingdom was taken away from him. We must rather take on the attitude of Eli who said, “It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him” (1 Sam. 3:18). We must strive to live righteous in the present age, face the consequences of our actions and use them as

chastening in order to better ourselves for God, for if we are willing to do this then we have a greater hope in heaven where any and all suffering will be done away.

- 1 Sam. 15:35: Let us not cause the Lord to regret that He used us in His service.
- 1 Sam. 16:14, 15: When we are unwilling to repent and submit ourselves to the Lord, our souls cannot help but be distressed for we are forced to face the trials of life on our own. The Psalmist expresses this very thing in Psalm 32:1-5. “When I kept silent, my bones grew old...” Let us not shut God out of our lives.
- 1 Sam. 18:6-9: When we seek our own glory and not the Lords we risk becoming bitter against those who are closest to us. Let us humble ourselves and remember to give others the preference (Rom. 12:9, 10).
- 1 Sam. 18:12-14: We know we are in desperate need of repentance when we are afraid of the people whom the Lord is with. Let us always strive to live in such a way that the Lord may be with us.
- 1 Sam. 19:5-17; 20:29-33: Saul’s fickleness is one example of the turmoil that one goes through when they are removed from the presence of the Lord. We sing a song “None of self and all of thee.” When we are consumed with ourselves we begin to grow bitter against anyone or anything that stands in our way, even God. Let us learn from Saul that we can be selfish and bitter for the rest of our lives and be miserable, or, we can turn to God with a humble heart and be saved (2 Pet. 2:9, 10).
- Weaknesses should help us remember our need for God’s guidance and help. A lesson that Saul was too proud to learn.
- Jealousy, envy and hatred destroy one’s life and soul.
- Faithful countenance is essential to please God (cf. Ezek 18:24).
- 1 Sam. 31; 1 Chron. 10: We will reap what we sow (See 1 Chron. 10:13-14).

Jonathan

Bible Characters: Lesson 19

“Jonathan”: “Yahweh (God) has given”

Text: 1 Samuel 13:2-31:13; 1 Chronicles 10:1, 2

The oldest son of Israel’s first King (1 Sam. 14:49), a mighty man of valor, loving, devout, and honest; by these can Jonathan’s character be described. He was a man who was loyal to his king and father (1 Sam. 14:43), and at the same time put his faith in the mighty power of God (1 Sam. 14:6). Jonathan accomplished much in his battling for the Lord’s army. He was not one to be idle when there was work to be done (1 Sam. 14:1-14). Jonathan seemed to be a passionate, whole hearted man who sought truth and righteousness. He was a peacemaker among men (1 Sam. 19). It is almost a shame that his life on this earth was ended as it was, but, though the end of his life was a tragic one there is some conciliation in this, that he died battling against the Lord’s enemies.

Lessons:

- 1 Sam. 14:6: Jonathan understood and trusted the power of the Almighty God.
- 1 Sam. 14:26-30: This can be taken in two ways. 1) Jonathan was not one to heed rash and unjust statements. He would not submit himself to foolishness. 2) He might have had more humility in heeding the voice of the Lord’s anointed.
- 1 Sam. 14:31-46: We see the consequences of making rash vows. We must also note that when one man makes a rash and foolish vow, sometimes it is up to others to make that man’s folly known to him that he might repent of such things. In any case however, “It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay” (Eccl. 5:4, 5) See also Prov. 22:25. Consider carefully what you commit yourself to.
- 1 Sam. 18:1-4: True friendship is not to be taken lightly. We see in Jonathan the great respect and value that is to be placed on a sincere and loving friendship. In his generosity Jonathan provides an excellent example of the love that is described in 1 Corinthians 13. *“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own...”* (vs. 4, 5).
- 1 Sam. 19:1-6: When there are those around us who take pleasure in doing evil things, it is partly our responsibility to try to persuade them from doing such things. God has said that He will give wisdom to those who ask (Prov. 2:6). In Prov. 26:5 it says, *“Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes.”* Jonathan was able to use wisdom in order to answer the folly of his father’s foolishness. Let us seek for the wisdom and the courage to answer others in this same manner.
- 1 Sam. 19:7; Rom. 12:18: *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”* *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”* (Matt. 5:9).

- 1 Sam. 20: We learn a great lesson from this chapter in what to do when an accusation is brought to our attention concerning another person. When dealing with such a situation a couple New Testament passages come to mind.

- 1 Corinthians 13:5-7

- 1 Timothy 5:19

Jonathan knew of his father's previous desire to kill David, he also knew of his father's repentance from that (1 Sam. 19:6). In light of this, David's accusation against Saul was a great dilemma for Jonathan because Jonathan loved his father. Because of his love he "believed all things" concerning his father's nature. But because of his love for David and for God He "delighted in truth" and therefore desired to find the truth on this matter. Any person with less integrity than Jonathan could have handled this situation in two different ways. 1) Automatically believe David and begin to build resentment against his father (which would go against 1 Tim. 5:19). 2) Deny David's accusation all together and begin to build resentment against David. Being more righteous than that, Jonathan sought to find out the truth (1 Sam. 20:5-16). Let us learn from Jonathan's example when dealing with accusations brought to us against other men.

- Do not believe an accusation brought to you unless there is some ground for truth in it (1 Sam. 20:3)

- If the accusing party firmly believes in what is accused, bring the accusation up to the person it is brought against (preferably having two or three witnesses). (vs. 12, 13).

- Consider both sides of the story. (vs. 12, 13).

- Be willing to face the truth (vs. 13, 33, 34).

- Try to persuade the erring party away from their sin (Whether it be the accuser, or the accused - vs. 32).

- Who ever is in the sin, do not use their sin as opportunity to be better against them. Rather, out of love, strive ever more to bring them out of sin.

- 1 Sam. 31; 1 Chron. 10:1, 2: "On a number of occasions Jonathan confronted Saul and rebuked him for trying to take David's life (19:4; 20:32). He even endangered his own life for David (20:33). Saul had manifested tremendous disrespect for his son, had verbally abused him, and had even tried to kill him (20:32). Saul had been a horrible example as a father, and Jonathan wasn't blind to his father's sins. And yet, when Saul will encounter the Philistines, Jonathan will die with him in battle (31:2).

- From a human point of view we are not prepared for this ending. Jonathan did everything right, and yet he died in the prime of life. He was a godly man, a courageous warrior, yet God allowed sinners to kill him. I don't know all the reasons why God allowed such a good man to die young, but Jonathan was prepared to accept such a destiny (20:14). Are we?

- Jonathan was fiercely loyal to David, but he also went out with his father into battle knowing that God wasn't with his dad. Like David, Jonathan continued to respect the office that Saul held. We live in a day and age when people often try to get out of a relationship or commitment at the first sign of problems. In fact

David would later say, “Saul and Jonathan...in their death they were not parted” (2 Sam. 1:23). Hence we would conclude that God expected Jonathan to support his father in battle. It is one of those sad realities of life that very good men often die or suffer because in this life we don’t receive our final reward. Hence, if this life doesn’t turn out to be everything we expected, if certain earthly or physical expectations and goals are never realized, that’s OK. One writer said of Jonathan, “Jonathan’s independence and capacity for acting on his own responsibility were combined with devotion to his father. While holding his own opinion and taking his own course, he conformed as far as possible to his father’s views and wishes. Filial duty (duty befitting a son) could not have been more severely tested than was that of Jonathan, but his conduct toward both his father and his friend is above criticism” (ISBE Revised / 1118).

- Jonathan is a great example of a man who overcame his surroundings. Though close to his father, Jonathan refused to think and act like this father. Every bad quality that we see in Saul, indecision, loving the praise of men, jealousy, envy, compromise, and so on, is lacking in Jonathan. In this man who had a poor example as a father, we see a complete lack of rebellion. Other passages make it clear that circumstances or even a poor upbringing are never meant to be a handicap which we can never grow beyond (Ezekiel 18:11-14 “he has a son who has observed all his father’s sins which he committed, and observing does not do likewise”). (Mark Dunagan).

David – 1

Bible Characters: Lesson 20

“David”: “Beloved” – Son of Jesse, tribe of Judah

Text: 1 Samuel 16-31

God has chosen a king to rule over Israel, Samuel the prophet has appointed him. A tall valiant looking man was Saul, but now this king has turned his heart away from the Lord and God is forced to “tear” him from the kingdom and appoint another king in His place. Samuel is then sent to anoint David, the son of Jesse, a ruddy young lad who could not even wear a suit of armor (1 Sam. 17:38, 39). But Samuel learns a good lesson in trusting the judgment of the Lord for “the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Unlike the valiant and handsome Saul, this ruddy young lad will grow to be a faithful servant of God, worthy of more glory and honor than Saul (1 Sam. 18:7; 2 Sam. 5:1-3). Though David sinned from time to time (all have – Rom. 3:23) by his desire to do the will of God and his faith and righteousness David overcame his weaknesses and walked upright before God and men. David “was a man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22).

Lessons:

- Acts 13:22: David was a man after God’s own heart
- 1 Sam. 16:14-23: Even as a young lad David was ready to be of service to His people. Let us always be ready to serve those who ask of us.
- 1 Sam. 17:22-51: There is no obstacle too big for those who “trust in the Lord with all (their) heart” (Prov. 3:5). Even the people around David who were at that time the Lords’ people mocked him when He would challenge the giant Goliath. But David was not easily discouraged. He would go before the giant, and he would prevail. Let us learn from both Goliath and David. From Goliath, “he who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12; 1 Sam. 17:41-44, 50, 51). From David, “He who glories let him glory in the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:31; 1 Sam. 17:45-47). And again, “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10).
- 1 Sam. 18:5: At times men can be wise but still act foolishly, such as Solomon (1 Kings 10:6, 7; 11:1, 2). The challenge however is to be both wise, and behave wisely. David accomplished this faithfully before the Lord. Let us strive to do the same thing.
- 1 Sam. 18:6-16: When we walk with the wisdom of the Lord there will be those who look upon us with disdain, jealousy, anger, and bitterness (vs. 6-12). At the same time there may be those who look upon us with great regard (vs. 13-16). What we must remember is that wisdom requires that we seek to please God, regardless of how other people view us. Strive to be as David who was at peace with God, for that is where we will find eternal life (Ps. 4:8; 37:1-3).
- 1 Sam. 18:18: David was humble.

- 1 Sam. 21:1-7: There are those who would attempt to use this passage as a reference to God's approval of "situation ethics." There are, however, a few difficulties with taking this view. First of all we must not ignore the fact that Jesus specifically said that David sinned when he ate this bread, Matt. 12:3, 4 – "how he ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat..." Mark 2:25, 26 – "and ate the showbread which is not lawful to eat." Luke 6:3, 4 – "...which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?" David was not justified in doing this. Those who would condone David's action and at the same time condemn those to do good are hypocritical in their judgments just as the Pharisees were. The reason that Jesus brought up the example of David, was not to justify breaking God's law in a given situation, but to expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. The Pharisees had justified David's actions, but were condemning the innocent actions of His disciples (Matthew 12:1). Remember, in Matthew 12:1ff, Jesus is not trying to justify disciples who have done something unscriptural. We must seek to establish God's righteousness, not a righteousness of our own (Rom. 10:3). In addition, bad things happened because David came here looking for food...(see next point)
- 1 Sam. 22:6-23: The choices that we make have the potential to affect the future wellbeing of other people as well as ourselves. We must consider the consequences of our actions (vs. 22).
- 1 Sam 23:1-5: David was willing to help others, even when it meant putting himself into harms way. But even in this He enquired of the Lord, seeking to do only the Lord's will.
- 1 Sam. 23:10-13: David was not too proud to pray to God for guidance when he was in need. David behaved with wisdom (1 Sam. 18:5) because he relied on the wisdom of God.
- 1 Sam. 24: David exemplifies what it is to respect our leaders, to have a humble heart and to have forgiveness toward those who persecute us (Rom. 12:14).
- 1 Sam. 25:1-35: There are times when we show kindness to some men and they return evil for our kindness. When this happened to David he used it as an opportunity to seek revenge, but we ought not do so. When Abigail was kind to David and offered her advice David admitted that she "kept him from blood shed," and that the Lord had "kept him from evil" (vs. 39). Like David there are times when we lose our temper, but we must keep our selves under control (2 Peter 1:6) and be willing to listen to reason when reason is offered.
- 1 Sam. 25:32-34, 36-39: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" says the Lord (Heb. 10:30-31). See also David's statement in 1 Sam. 26:9-11.
- 1 Sam. 26: Again we see the mercy that David had toward "the Lord's anointed" and those who served him. There are many in our country today who would speak evil of our leaders (consider all that was said against Bill Clinton). Though some leaders have been and are in the wrong, it is not our place to diminish the authority that the Lord has given them, but rather to pray for them, that they would follow the right way and lead us well (1 Tim. 2:1-3).

- 1 Sam. 27: Though David was in hiding (for lack of a better term) from Saul, he did not see this as an opportunity to do nothing. David was still the servant of the Lord and as such was obligated to carry out the Lord's will. We see this same attitude with the early Christians in Acts 8:1-4. What was David doing that would have been according to God's will? Read Josh. 13:1-2, 13; Josh. 16:10; Judges 1:29; Ex. 17:8, 16; 1 Sam. 15:7; Ex. 15:22. Compare the peoples mentioned in these passages to those mentioned in 1 Sam. 27:8. In Joshua 13 Joshua had grown old before he could lead Israel to the destruction of all the people of whom God had commanded that Israel destroy. Even in the Judges in Judges 1, instead of utterly destroying these foreign nations, certain tribes of Israel allowed them to live among them. But David was not unfaithful in matters of the Lord's commandments. It has taken several hundred years, but David was now fulfilling the command that God gave to Israel to utterly destroy these people. It is also interesting to note that though David had fled from those among his own people who were persecuting him, he still had the best interest of his people at heart.
- 1 Sam. 27:9-12: Though David was just in destroying these peoples, he was not just in how he explained himself to Achish. "David was a man after God's own heart, and yet he had his faults, which are recorded, not for our imitation, but for our admonition. Witness the story of this chapter, in which: I. We find, to his praise, that he prudently took care of his own safety and his family's (vs. 2-4) and valiantly fought Israel's battles against the Canaanites (vs. 8-9), yet, II. We find, to his dishonor, 1. That he began to despair of his deliverance (v. 1). 2. That he deserted his own country, and went to dwell in the land of the Philistines (v. 1, 5-7). 3. That he imposed upon Achish with an equivocation, if not a lie, concerning his expedition (v. 10-12)" (Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible).
- 1 Sam. 30: In 2 Thess. 3:10 the apostle Paul stated, "He who does not work neither let him eat." This is a good and faithful statement, but we must not confuse those who do not work with those whose role in their work is not as prominent as others may be. To illustrate this consider David's statement in 1 Sam. 30:22-25. David stated that "as his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike." This same principle can be applied to many things in life. A wife for instance who keeps the home and raises the children while the husband is working to support his family is not worthy of any less honor than the husband. But they share in their responsibilities for the family and therefore are worthy of equal honor. This can also be applied to the church. A Christian who supports and strengthens others in the congregation, but is not apt to teach publicly is not worthy of any less honor than a preacher or an elder. Those who fill certain roles in the church are worthy of just as much honor as those who fill more public roles. Let us understand the difference between not working, and working behind the scenes. Remember also that those who did not understand this principle were called, "wicked and worthless men."

David 2

Bible Characters: Lesson 21

Text: 2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1-2; 1 Chronicles 11-29

David is king and Saul is dead. It is here that we can truly see David's compassion for the Lord's anointed and his passion for righteousness (2 Sam. 1:1-16). This hunger and thirst for righteousness is a trait that will remain dominant in David's character throughout most of his life. Though David is now king his life does not grow much easier than before. There are still enemies to overcome (2 Sam. 2-4), debts to pay (2 Sam. 21:1-14), and a government to control (2 Sam. 15). From time to time we see David's weaknesses come out in all of this (2 Sam. 11), but if it is one thing that David never fails in it is repentance (2 Sam. 12:13). Indeed David's great love for God and his righteousness helps David to be a wise and valiant king. As always David had to face the consequences for his mistakes (2 Sam. 12:14), being a man of God did not change this. Members of his own family would turn against him (2 Sam. 15), trusted friends would betray him (2 Sam. 16:15-23). But David understood that if he were to be successful he must not rely on himself to bring vengeance on his enemies, rather his strength must come from the Lord (2 Sam. 16:11, 12).

Lessons:

- 2 Sam. 1:11-16: We can see David's deep feelings for Jonathan and for Saul, "the Lord's anointed." We can also see the severity of raising a hand against the Lord's anointed by the way David reacts to the young Amalekite. Let us not however think that we can use our hands to smite those who do wrong as David did. Saul is dead; David is now king, appointed by God. He is God's anointed. He has the authority, we do not.
- 2 Sam. 2:1-2: Let us always be reminded of the trust that David put in God. He inquired of the Lord concerning almost all that he did. Let us do the same (Prov. 3:5-7).
- 2 Sam. 4:35, 36: David was a leader whom the people could look up to. His manner of life and his loyalty to God was such that the people trusted his judgment and respected it.
- 2 Sam. 4:5-12: Just because a ruler is either no longer in office or is no longer alive does not give us opportunity to speak evil of him, or to injure him. One example is Bill Clinton. Many have taken opportunity to speak harsh things against him since he is no longer in office. Like Saul, he was unjust, nevertheless he was appointed by God to rule a nation and as such we still owe him the respect due a leader, though he is no longer in office.
- 2 Sam. 5:20: David accomplished great feats in his life, yet he never took the glory for himself. Rather he was a great example of 1 Cor. 1:31. "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."
- 2 Sam. 6:1-8: David thought it time to bring the ark of God back to Jerusalem, so he provided a new cart and had the ark placed on it. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab,

drove the cart. God had in days gone by, however, given specific instructions as to how the ark was to be transported (Num. 4:15). God's way of transporting it was to be observed. But "when they came to the threshing-floor of Nacon, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took a hold of it; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error and there he died by the ark of God (vs. 6, 7). Naturally, David became very displeased. After all, why should God employ such drastic measures in making a point? Uzzah, no doubt, meant well. His act, evidently, was an act of good intention and sincere concern, but God left the distinct impression upon Uzzah's surrounding survivors that Uzzah's act was wrong. God meant what he had already said! Today it is so easy for people to begin to doubt the seriousness of God's word. It is one thing for a person to casually admit that God has spoken. It is quite another thing for a person to be impressed with the fact that God's word is to be treated reverently in a spirit of obedience. In a society where God's name is blasphemed in the most trivial of circumstances and where the morality of Christ is rejected because of its lack of convenience the church of our Lord must be exceedingly careful lest her attitude toward the Scriptures becomes casual. If you are ever tempted to think that in the final analysis God, after all is said and done, really does not mean what he says, remember the story of Uzzah (Deaver).

- 2 Sam. 6:3, 12, 13: There are times when we sin out of ignorance. God does not excuse our sin because of our ignorance as seen above, but He does allow us other opportunities to do things right. David took this second opportunity (vs. 12, 13) to do correctly what he has done wrong before in carrying the ark. This time, instead of putting the ark on a cart, he had men bearing the ark as God had commanded. Let us learn from David's repentance and willingness to change when in the wrong.
- 2 Sam. 7:5-29: "Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any god beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears" (vs. 22). David was one who gloried in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:31). How often do we take the time to praise God and glorify Him?
- 2 Sam. 8:10, 11: Often times, especially in our present society, when people come by a sudden increase of money or some sort of bonus that was not planned the first thought on most people's mind is, "What can I spend this money on that will make me happiest?" Indeed it would seem very tempting to use any extra riches to get the things that we always wanted. But let us consider David's approach to a situation like this. "*Then Toi sent Joram his son unto king David...to bless him. And Joram brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass: Which also king David did dedicate unto the Lord.*" Though it is tempting to think only of ourselves in this situation, is it not better to think of God first? Jesus commanded us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Is it seeking first the kingdom of God to use all things to please our selves, or to please God? David saw it as an opportunity to please God.
- 2 Sam. 9:1:6-10: It was not enough for David to simply not speak evil against the Lord's anointed. David was willing to go so far as to seek out any who remained of Saul's household that he might bless them. There are many today who will use any ill turn toward them as opportunity to become bitter against a person. There are also those who are so haughty as to become bitter against all who are related to their "enemy" or who

would dare to associate with them. David however shows us how to be righteous in situations such as this. David fulfilled the Lord's command to "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44). It is easy enough to return evil for evil, but to return love for evil, this is commendable before God.

- 2 Sam. 10:1-4: 1 Peter 2:19 – *“For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.” “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 5:6).
- 2 Sam. 10:12: Even in situation where we know what we want and are ready to fight for it, we must remember that all things are in God's hands and it is His will that must be done, not ours. *“And may the Lord do what is good in His sight.”*
- 2 Sam. 11: There are times when we sin that we do everything we can to conceal our sin. Inevitably our sins keep getting deeper and deeper and eventually they catch up to us (12:9, 10). Such was the case with David. He first commits adultery, then that woman is with a child by him. In an attempt to conceal his sin he sends for the woman's husband and tries to make him lie with his wife so that they will think that the child is his. When that does not work David orders to have the man killed. How far will one go? But as it ends up, the words of Jesus are fulfilled saying, *“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known”* (Matt. 10:26). And again, *“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”* (Matt. 15:18, 19). We can hide sin and lie about it, but in the end it just boils up in side us creation turmoil within us, unless we repent and confess out sins.
- 2 Sam. 12:1-13: After his sin had been revealed and David was rebuked by the Lord he repented of his sins (vs. 13). This is the attitude that we all ought to have. We are going to sin (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:10). Whether or not our heart is right with God is determined by our willingness to repent and come out of sin. This is why David, though he did these evil things, was still considered a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22).
- 2 Sam. 12:1-7: There times when easily see sin in others, but not so easily in ourselves. We are quick to judge others despite our own sins. When David first heard the parable that Nathan the prophet spoke to him, this was the case. But as Nathan said, “you are the man.” In judging the man in the parable David was actually pronouncing judgment upon himself. This is what Jesus was talking about when He said, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” And again, “And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye” (Matt. 7:1-5)? Let us consider ourselves lest we be too quick to pass judgment on other and in turn bringing condemnation upon ourselves.
- 2 Sam. 12:13-23: Though we repent of our sins it does not save us from the physical consequences of sin. This is something that we all should consider before we decide to do wrong. Is it worth it?
- 2 Sam. 13:34-14:21: The wise are those who listen to wisdom. Do not be fooled by the world. There are many who would say “to listen to other's advice embarrassing and humiliating.” But by the wisdom of God the psalmist wrote, *“Give instruction to a wise*

man, and he will be still wiser, Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning” (Prov. 9:9). David was as this wise man.

- 2 Sam. 16:5-12: There will be those who curse us and taunt us when we do not deserve it, but we need to have the same mind that David had, “It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day.”
- 2 Sam. 21:1-3: David was an honorable man. Though he did not make the mistake himself, he still took it upon himself to correct it.
- 2 Sam. 24:18-25: In a world where everybody wants something for nothing it is good to remember that nothing is free. We owe all that we have to the Lord; it is not good enough that we gave back to Him only that which costs us little or nothing. Whether we give our service or what we prosper let us never try to cheat God out of what we truly owe Him.
- 1 Kings 2:3: Before David died he was able to give Solomon the best advice a father can give to a son.

Absalom

Bible Characters: Lesson 22

“Absalom”: “Father is/of peace” Third son of David, with a foreign mother.

Text: 2 Sam. 3:3; 2 Sam. 13-20.

Absalom, the third son of King David, born to him of Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. Absalom’s life is a sad story of a young man who never learned to take control of his fleshly desires. His sensual desires drove him to rape his own sister while his pride drove him to turn against his own father in order to steal the throne from underneath him. It seems that Absalom’s life was spent in constant pursuit of fulfilling these desires, but once each one was fulfilled he was worse off than when he started. His life is a good example for those who cannot take control of themselves, for in the end Absalom died a miserable and humiliating death, just as all men do who are not willing to submit to the almighty God.

Lessons:

- 2 Sam. 13:22-29: When we give in to hatred, bitterness and wrath our mind tends to dwell on that as the hatred boils up inside of us, just as it did with Absalom. His hatred toward his brother because of his sister never went away. Instead it grew for two years until finally he had opportunity to release that hatred by killing his brother. To some Absalom may have seemed justified in this action, but when we look at the character that is outlined by godliness we see that it is not so. Notice that in verse 22 it specifically says “Absalom spoke to his brother Amnon neither good nor bad. For Absalom hated Amnon...” Compare this verse with the law that they were under in that day (Lev. 19:17, 18). We find that in this single act of hatred against his brother Absalom commits six sins. 1. “You shall not hate your brother in your heart.” 2. “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor” (Absalom did not even speak to his brother). 3. “And not bear sin because of him” (Absalom bore great sin). 4. “You shall not take vengeance” (Absalom killed his brother) 5. “Nor bear any grudge against the children of your people” (this whole issue was because Absalom bore a grudge) 6. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Absalom hated rather than loved). Was Absalom justified in his actions? Of Course not! And neither are we. We would do good to learn from Absalom’s example and not walk in his steps. We must rather “add to our faith...self control” (2 Peter 1:5-7).
- 2 Sam. 13:37-38: You know you are in sin when you have to rely on friends who are not of God’s people in order to be comforted (Talmai was Absalom’s grandfather on his mother’s side, a foreign king – 2 Sam. 3:3). Often today young Christians, even some older, would rather spend their time with people of the world because they know that most other Christians will not agree with the things that they like to do. Absalom fled to his grandfather because his grandfather did not care about Absalom’s sin. We need to pay attention to the people we choose to surround ourselves with, it might tell us where our heart is.

- 2 Sam. 14:25-33: As we learn throughout the scriptures, a good looking man does not always equal a man with good character. Like Saul, Absalom was very good looking, but as we can see this goodness was only skin deep. Let us learn from this to examine the works of men, not the appearance. It is from judging the works of Absalom that we find that his heart is not of the same good nature as his appearance. If a man is willing to burn his neighbor's entire field just to get his attention, how far will he go to get all that his heart desires?
- 2 Sam. 15:1-6: Now we begin to see the motives of Absalom, the ground for all his reasoning. His vanity and pride determined his actions; he is consumed with vain deceit. "Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice" (vs. 4). Did he desire to see the king in chapter 14 because he missed his father? Or was it because he needed the influence of royalty in order to put himself in a position of power? It seems that the people of Israel were only willing to see Absalom for what he wanted them to see (vs. 6). It is true that love "believes all things" and so we are not to doubt the character of every man we meet. Let us remember, however, that love is not blind. We still have a command to examine all things, to test every spirit whether it be from God or from men, and to not follow any man blindly. Let us keep our eyes open for men like Absalom.
- A good lesson for parents: Notice that we never see David rebuking Absalom. In today's society there is a strong belief that to rebuke or punish a child will only give them "a complex." Let us be impressed with the fact that Absalom's "complex" is bigger than ever, yet as far as we can see he was never rebuked or punished. Had David disciplined Absalom as a father ought, his "complex" might have actually been kept under control.
- 2 Sam. 16:15-17:14: There are some who may take delight in Absalom's position saying that though he was a deceiver, he had much glory and honor. It is true that for a time the evil hearted may have some earthly pleasure, but it never lasts. In fact it was the same pride and conceit which brought Absalom into power that tore him from it. Blinded by his pride Absalom was led by counsel that, though it seemed wise to him, became his downfall (17:14). Indeed we see that "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 16:25). When we walk according to our own desire (as Absalom did) we will face the wrath of God, but when we walk according to God's desire, then we are rewarded (Prov.3:5-7).
- 2 Sam. 18:9-18: Absalom's death can be summarized with these words, "You reap what you sow" (Gal. 6:7, 8).

Solomon

Bible Characters: Lesson 23

“Solomon”: “Peaceful”

“Jedidiah” (2 Sam. 12:25): “Beloved of the Lord.” Son of David, Third King of Israel.

Text: 2 Sam. 5:14; 12:24, 25; 1 Kings 1:10 – 1 Kings 11; 1 Chron. 22:5 – 29:30; 2 Chron. 1-10.

Other References: Song of Solomon, Neh. 13:26; Psalm. 72; Matt. 6:29; 12:42.

Solomon, born to David in Jerusalem (1 Sam. 5:14), raised to be king, wisest among men. The story of Solomon is a sad yet beneficial one. Here we have a young man upon whose shoulders a kingdom is placed. He was faithful and obedient to the will of God. When offered by God anything his heart desired, all he could think about was having the wisdom to rule his people. Because of this humble and righteous attitude God blessed Solomon with more than any man could imagine. His wisdom was greater than any who have walked the earth, save the Lord's. His wealth was so great that he had cities designated to the care of each category of his belongings; one for his chariots, one for livestock, etc. Though not one of his better attributes, he had hundreds of wives and concubines from countries all over the world. He accomplished many mighty works before God including the building of the temple of the Lord. All seemed perfect; Solomon had faith, wisdom and power. Truly this was a great man, but what was to be his blessing ended up his downfall. There are many who spend a lifetime striving to surround themselves with earthly blessings, but more often than not all it brings them is condemnation. Such was the case with Solomon. *“For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David”* (1 Kings 11:4). Let us not forget the life of Solomon, for there is much that we can learn concerning wisdom and loyalty, and those things that draw us away.

Lessons:

- 1 Kings 1; 2:15: Men can die trying to get their own way, but in the end their toils will be in vain for the Lord will prevail (Prov. 16).
- 1 Kings 2:1-3: Take note of the instruction that David gives Solomon before his death. This is the instruction that all fathers ought to give their sons. *“And keep the charge of the Lord you God; to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies...”* (vs. 3).
- 1 Kings 2:13-25: “Here is a powerful reminder that those who are least to be trusted who have once proved themselves to be enemies, especially when they suddenly appear with tokens of peace...Ambitious and power-hungry people do not hesitate to use any means to obtain the ends they cannot acquire by force. When they can no longer demand, they beg” (Dilday p. 58). “But Solomon saw through Adonijah’s request, in fact he viewed this as another attempt on the part of Adonijah to take the throne, with the help of Joab and Abiathar. Taking possession of a wife or Harem of a deceased king was equivalent to

establishment of the claim to the throne (2 Sam. 12:8; 16:22)” (Dunagan, 1 Kings 2:22-25).

- 1 Kings 2:16, 27: Abiathar was the last descendant of the Ithamar branch of the priestly family. When he was banished, the high priesthood reverted to the descendants of Eleazar who was represented in Solomon’s day by Zadok. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy made concerning the decline and removal of Eli’s descendants as priests (1 Sam. 2:31-36)” (Dunagan).
- 1 Kings 2:23-35: Many people in the church today view it as being harsh to “reject a divisive man” from the church “after the first and second admonition.” Let us be reminded concerning the wisdom of Solomon who removed those people from his kingdom who desired to turn the people from their leader and who did all things for selfish gain. Though the discipline that the church is to exercise toward those who are disobedient is not as harsh as Solomon’s, the principle of such action still applies. “*Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning*” (Titus 3:10, 11). “*For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain*” (Titus 1:10, 11).
- 1 Kings 3:1; 11:1-4: Even in the early years of Solomon’s reign we see the seed of what will eventually draw him away from the Lord beginning to sprout. The applications that we can draw from this are so great that it would take pages to cover them all. Instead let us just say this: The biggest problems start with one small step away from truth (Solomon began to marry foreign wives, parents don’t discipline their children soon enough, a young person gets into a relationship with a person of a different faith, etc.). Solomon began his reign by marrying foreign wives and it ended up leading him away from the Lord. Let us keep our eyes open.
- 1 Kings 9:1-3; 2 Chron. 6:6: In the Law of Moses in Num. 33:52 and Deut. 12:2-5 God commanded that the high places (places of pagan worship) be utterly destroyed. He also commanded that Israel not worship Him in these places, but worship Him only in the place or places that He chose for His name to be known. Solomon knew that God had told David his father that He chose Jerusalem as this designated place (2 Chron. 6:4-6). After Solomon had finished building the Lord’s temple and had made supplication to the Lord, the Lord revealed to Solomon, “I have consecrated this house that you have built to put my name there forever, My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually” (1 Kings 9:3). We would do good to note the relationship that God had with Israel through this temple. Today, the Jewish temple being destroyed, God has a new temple in which He dwells with His people – The church (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 2 Cor. 6:16, 17; Eph. 2:19-22). The fact that Christ’s church is now the Lord’s Temple ought to bring some interesting facts to mind:

☞ The temple of the Lord is the only scriptural place of worship: According to Deut. 12:2-5 the only place that God could be worshiped is in the place that He chose. God chose Jerusalem as the place where the temple was built, and no other place. Therefore no other place could God be worshiped except in that temple. The church, being the temple of God today, is the only “place” which acceptable

worship can be offered up to God. We know that there is no one location for the church; therefore the place is not physical, but spiritual. Therefore a person must be in the church (baptized and faithful) in order to be able to offer up acceptable worship to God.

☞ There is only one temple: This is true today for we find in Eph. 4:4 that there is only one body (which is also the church). Therefore this idea that there are many faiths and many bodies in which men can acceptably worship God is absurd.

☞ Worship outside the temple is idolatrous worship: Since there is only one church and therefore only one temple, those who worship God who are not in that one church (who are in other churches) worship Him in vain, for their worship is not to God, but to devils (Deut. 32:16-18).

☞ There is only one high priest: Since there is only one temple there can only be one high priest who is the mediator between man and God. We know this High Priest to be the man, Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:6-12). We must conclude therefore that if a person is in any other church than the church of Christ, they do not have Jesus Christ as a High Priest and therefore do not have the eternal redemption that He offers (vs. 12).

- 1 Kings 3:5-14: A people can appreciate a leader who seeks to do what is good for them. We see this attitude in Solomon as God offers to give him anything he wanted. Where most men would ask for great power, riches, or glory, Solomon simply asked for the wisdom to rule his people. God was impressed with this just as we should be. Solomon asked for that which he could use for the good of others and God gave him more than he asked for (3:13). Jesus taught that all of His people ought to have this attitude (Matt. 18:1-4). Let us also pray that we have wisdom (Jas. 1:5).
- 1 Kings 8: See how Solomon gave glory to God for all that was fulfilled in Jerusalem in those days. Too many times people fail to give God the glory in their own lives and in the end they suffer for it. But as Solomon did here and as Paul instructed in 1 Cor. 1:31, “If anyone glories, let him glory in the Lord.”
- 1 Kings 10:14-11:43: In the beginning of his reign Solomon was indeed a faithful and a wise man. Because of this the Lord blessed him with greater riches and glory than any other king who has walked the face of the earth. But even Solomon’s great wisdom could not stop him from being led astray by his fleshly desires in the midst of this physical wealth. Solomon gathered to Himself many, many wives to which his love was turned. It is sad to see a man as great and as wise as Solomon fall into such a desolate situation. But let his life not be in vain, for there is much to learn from his example:
 - ☞ Wisdom does not prevent sin, only faith and self control (2 Peter 1:5-7).
 - ☞ We ought to put our faith in God, for even the wisest of men can be led astray.
 - ☞ With wisdom comes great responsibility, and with power comes great temptation.
 - ☞ One wife ought to be enough for any man.
 - ☞ Choose your spouse wisely.
 - ☞ “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” (Eccl. 12:13-14).

Elijah

Bible Characters: Lesson 24

“Elijah”: “Yahweh is God.”

Text: 1 Kings 17- 2 Kings 10; 2 Chron. 21:12.

The story of Elijah is that of a man of God who, seemingly all alone, remains faithful to God to carry out His will. Elijah’s life is one that can give comfort to those struggling with the evils of this world who feel alone in a wicked generation (1 Kings 19:10-18), and at the same time remind all people that we stand before God in all that we do (1 Kings. 17:1). Though Elijah’s appearance was not much to look at (2 Kings 1:8), like John the baptism (Matt. 3:4), Elijah was a servant who was worthy of the greatest (Matt. 18:4; Matt. 23:11; Luke 22:24-27) as we can see from the end of his story (2 Kings 2).

Lessons:

- 1 Kings 17:1: Like Elijah, we should never forget who it is that we stand before in all that we do. *“As the Lord God of Israel live, before whom I stand...”* Whether we are teaching, traveling, or whatever we do we must never forget that we stand before the living God. *“Whatever you do in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord”* (Col. 3:17).
- 1 Kings 17:2-6: To have to rely on the Lord as Elijah did is a hard thing for most people. Notice that Elijah did not worry about having enough to eat or to drink. He did not question God when He said the ravens would feed him. When God told him to get up and go, Elijah “did according to the word of the Lord.” Let us learn from Elijah to *“trust in the Lord with all of your heart...”* (Prov. 3:5-7).
- 1 Kings 17:8-16: It is an interesting thing to see how the Lord uses stories of people who lived under the Old Covenant, thousands of years before us, to illustrate principles that we are to learn and to practice today under the New Covenant. Here we read of a widow who denied herself and her son in order to feed and care for a man of God. This is the same attitude that Christ said His followers (Christians) are to have in Luke 9:23. *“If anyone desires to come after Me let him deny himself...”* Paul reflected this same attitude in his letter to the Philippians when he wrote, *“I count all things at loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Phil. 3:8). We see it also in the churches of Macedonia where Paul says, *“but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God”* (2 Cor. 8:5). Let us learn from this widow’s example and from the examples of the early Christians to give of ourselves, the Lord will not leave us desolate.
- 1 Kings 17:17-24; 18:41-46: *“The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (James 5:16-18).
- 1 Kings 18:21: So often this is the case with many who call themselves “the Lord’s people”. Though it is convenient to worship God and claim Him as our Lord and still do things contrary to His word, God is not our Lord unless we surrender all to Him. Let us

remember Elijah's words, "*If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.*" The Lord is God!

- 1 Kings 18:22-38: It is impressive to see God's hand at work. It also builds up the faith in those who follow God to see that even against forty of the false prophets of Baal it only took one prophet and the mighty power of God to show His superiority. Let us learn from this account that 1) God is Almighty, there is none greater, 2) "The Lord, He is God!" (vs. 39), 3) the majority is often wrong (the number of false prophets were 40 to 1 prophet of God).
- The world has exalted itself upon a pedestal believing that its wisdom is greater than God's. Notice the prophets who, in their "wisdom," dance around foolishly while cutting themselves and hollering to some non-existent god with no power whatsoever. Is this the wisdom that we want to follow? This may be a ridiculous scene, but it is not far different from the people today to get drunk in the bars, fight over women and drive around wildly, often killing people in the process for the sake of enjoying their freedom. Even the wisdom of those who believe we ought to do all we can to keep another tree from falling to the ground is foolishness to the God who will destroy every tree along with the rest of creation on the judgment day. Accounts such as this one are recorded for our example (1 Cor. 10:1-11). They are there to show us that the wisdom and power of God are far greater than any thing we can find in the world (1 Cor. 3:19, 20).
- 1 Kings 19:1-4: Even God's most faithful people have their moments of weakness, but they remain faithful because they do not let that weakness keep them down. Elijah overcame his fear (1 Kings 19:18, 19).
- 1 Kings 19:5-18: Though we have our moments of weakness, it is not acceptable to put off our duty to God because of them. Often times our fear is exaggerated in our own minds (compare vs. 10 and 18). Though Elijah thought he was the only one left, God knew that He had 7,000 left in Israel. This should bring comfort to the faithful few who feel that they are all alone in the world.
- God has the power to create strong winds that can tear into mountains and break rocks, He has the power to create the mightiest of earthquakes and the power to fuel raging fires. Who are we to fear mere men? "*Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell*" (Luke 12:4, 5).
- 2 Kings 1: From this passage we get a glimpse of the seriousness of turning to our own devices rather than the Lord. Why do men seek sinful things? It is not because there is no God in heaven; rather it is because most are unwilling to face their dependence and accountability toward the Almighty.
- 2 Kings 1:8: It does not take a refined man with fancy cloths to be a spokesman of God. Remember, many of God's most faithful prophets had little more than the clothes on their back to their name. Matt. 8:20; Matt. 3:4.
- 2 Kings 2: The account of how Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind and chariot of fire is one that may be hard to imagine, but has become the scene by which most remember the prophet Elijah. Consider what faith a man of God must have had to be taken up like this. Compare this incident with that of Enoch in Gen. 5:24.

Ahab and Jezebel

Bible Character: Lesson 25

“Ahab”: “The brother is father” or “Uncle”

“Jezebel”: “Chaste”

Text: 1 Kings 16:29 - 2 Kings 9:37

In 1Corinthians 10:6 Paul wrote concerning the Old Testament that *“these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved.”* This is the reason that we have record of people like Ahab and Jezebel. From the beginning to the bitter end of their lives as recorded in the scriptures we see nothing but evil, disobedience, and idolatry. As much as Christ is our example to follow, these two are our example for what not to follow. Because of their wickedness Ahab and Jezebel faced a death too terrible to think of, and such will be our fate if we follow in their footsteps. Let us therefore learn in these two the importance of obeying God and keeping His commandments that we may not face a similar judgment.

Lessons:

- 1 Kings 16:30, 31: For some people it is almost as if it were by nature that they disobey God (Trivial: light, a thing requiring little effort). We see much of this same attitude today in those people who are so bold as to sue individuals and even television studios for mentioning the name of God over the air. These are the people that Paul writes of in Rom. 1:21-32. *“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened...And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are now proper.”* Let it be understood, God is a living God and there is ample evidence for that (Rom. 1:18-20). Therefore every person who is disobedient toward Him will face His wrath (see 1 Kings 21:17-24).
- We must not fail to apply the above lesson to our society today. The philosophy has been spreading rapidly that says some crimes are inherent or natural. Let us learn from Ahab that no matter how “trivial” or “natural” or “comfortable” a sin may seem to a person, it does not excuse them of their sins. When a person commits homosexuality, adultery, thievery, covetousness, or any other sin, that person is guilty. Man can make any excuse they want, but unless that person repents and becomes obedient to God, they will be punished (2 Thess. 1:5-9).
- 1 Kings 18:16-18: We can tell when a person is dead set in their sins when they accuse righteous men of being the troublers of a people. This is what Jesus spoke to His disciples about when He said, *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insult at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the*

prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12). Let it be known that no matter how much men of the world, or even some brethren insult and persecute the righteous, the righteous are not the ones causing division, truth is only a trouble to those who are not willing to accept it. *“I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord”* (1 Kings 18:18).

- 1 Kings 18:36-40; 19:1, 2: It is amazing to see people who, though they have witnessed or have heard report of the power of God, still refuse to submit to Him. Jezebel was one such person. In spite of the awesome power that God manifest through Elijah, Jezebel would not turn from her evil ways. In fact, the wickedness of Jezebel was so terrible that her evil was used in the New Testament to represent the evil that would turn God’s people from Him.
- 1 Kings 20:1-21: When a nation is willing to submit to God’s will God will help them (vs. 13ff). God can use these nations to punish those who are unwilling to submit to His will (Vs. 28). Let us pray that our nation is not on the receiving end (1 Tim. 2:1-4).
- 1 Kings 20:26-43: God does not approve of men who leave the job half finished (vs. 42). Many men will use the passage that says, *“God desires mercy, not sacrifice”* (Matt. 12:7; Hos. 6:6) to do exactly what Ahab was condemned for in this passage. When God specifically commands something it is not mercy to disobey it, it is disobedience. The same goes with our brethren in the church. God has given a command to rebuke the sinful and for the sinful to repent. It is not merciful to refrain from practicing discipline on the unruly, it is disobedience.
- 1 Kings 21:1-10: In the New Testament we have a command to *“not be unequally yoked”* (1 Cor. 6:14). The marriage of Ahab and Jezebel is one good reason why. Every person is tempted by one thing or another. When we marry, or even befriend faithful Christians we can each help one another to overcome those temptations. When we bind ourselves to unbelievers however, more often than not, they try to persuade us in the wrong direction. Ahab, who was from Israel, married Jezebel of the Sidonians (1 Kings 16:31). What did Jezebel do when Ahab was tempted to take another man’s property? She went and had it done for him. We can understand the influence that a sinful person can have on their spouse, let us not make the same mistake as Ahab.
- 1 Kings 22:1-28: In the New Testament Paul warned Timothy of a time when men would turn from the truth and listen to teachers who only taught what the people wanted to hear (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Though Paul prophesied of the future of the church this same principal has been true since the beginning. We see this same attitude in Ahab who was willing to listen to prophets and 400 men who all told him what he wanted to hear, but the only prophet in that place who would speak the word of God, Ahab would not hear. *“There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil”* (vs. 8). As if this was not foolish enough, Ahab’s evil heart is manifest even further as he says, *“How long must I adjure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord”* (vs. 16)? When asked to prophecy what Ahab wanted to hear this one prophet, Micaiah, responded, *“As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak”* (vs. 14). We need to have this same attitude in the world today. Often we will encounter people who, if we do not teach the bible in the way that they like, will accuse us of being “legalistic” or “unloving.” Remember the

command, “*Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God.*” (1 Pet. 4:11). We are on this earth to obey God (Eccl. 12:12, 13), not to tickle men’s ears.

- 1 Kings 22:18-40: Those who are stubborn and choose to not hear the words of the Lord God will reap what they sow.
- 2 Kings 9:36, 37; Rev. 2:20-23: Through the latter half of 1 Kings we read of the wickedness of the woman Jezebel. We see how she persecuted and murdered the Lord’s prophets, how she caused many of the people of God to commit immoral acts and worship other gods. We see her own deception in dealing with her husband sharing with him in their immorality and evil. This woman’s wickedness was so terrible that the judgment that God pronounced on her is worse than any man would dare to think. Though she is dead, her wickedness lives on. In Revelation 2 John writes of her wickedness polluting the church just as it did God’s people in the days of Elijah. It is not a pleasant thought to think of the outcome of those who follow her. It is imperative therefore that we who are Christians strive evermore to be obedient to God.

Elisha and Naaman

Bible Characters: Lesson 26

“Elisha”: “God is Savior” or “Salvation”

“Naaman”: “Pleasant”

Text: 1Kings 19:6-2Kings 13:20. Naaman: 2 Kings 5

As the life of the great prophet Elijah began to draw to an end the Lord directed him to select a predecessor who would fill his place. This young man was Elisha. Elisha was what who showed great faith in God and a zeal to do His work. He gave up everything to serve God. He killed the oxen with which he plowed his fields, cooked them using the wood from the plow that the oxen pulled, and then fed the people with the meat. Truly, this was a man who was devoted to fulfilling what God had required of him. We would do good to learn from this man. Naaman on the other hand was not so willing. It was not after much argument that this man was finally persuaded by his won servant to obey the word of the Lord. As always God’s will was proved true, but as we see the story of Naaman and the life of Elisha, let us be impressed with the power of God to carry out His will. We can either work with God, or work against Him.

Lessons:

- 1 Kings 19:19-21: There are many in the world who do not know what it is to devote themselves to God. Elisha was not one of these men. Jesus said that whoever follows Him must not only “hate” (not think of more worth than Jesus) his father and mother, but is to hate his own life. This is the same commitment that Elijah expects of Elisha. Elisha did not make excuses, but merely asked Elijah if he could say good by to his father and mother, for Elisha knew as well as Elijah, that to be a prophet is to be alone in the world and to be busy about the Lord’s work (1 Kings 19:10). When Elijah asked the question, “for what have I done to you,” he was not questioning or rebuking Elisha, he was rather affirming what he had done, bringing to the mind of Elisha what it is that he is getting himself into. One might interpret this encounter as thus, “I have placed my mantle on your shoulders calling you to be a prophet of God. Say goodbye to your family, for from this time on you will be the Lord’s servant, never to return.” We must learn from Elisha’s willingness to go with Elijah. Today we are called to be servants of God. We are called into a life from which we can never return to our former life. When we are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:2-14) we too must bid farewell to our former life (Luke 9:62; 2 Pet. 2:20-22). Just as Elisha burned his plow and killed his oxen, we must do so with those things in which we lived before we came to Christ. We must give our lives to God (Eph. 6:19, 20).
- 2 Kings 2:9-10: Elisha was not asking for twice as much of the prophetic spirit as Elijah has possessed (i.e., let me be twice as good as you were). Rather, his request relates to Deuteronomy 21:17, where the firstborn son was entitled to a double share of the father’s

estate. Elisha wanted to be designated as Elijah's rightful heir. Granting such a request was not directly within the power of Elijah. Only God could designate a man as spiritual leader of the nation. If God should grant Elisha the privilege of actually witnessing the translation of Elijah into heaven, this would be the sign that his request had been granted (Dunagan).

- 2 Kings 2:15-18: Sometimes men are so stubborn that the only way a person can make them see their wrong is to let them fall into it.
- 2 Kings 2:223-25; Prov. 16:31; 20:29: Honor your elders.
- 2 Kings 4:1-7: God does not leave the helpless desolate. He uses all things to bring about His will. See also John 11:38-44, esp. vs. 40.
- 2 Kings 4:8-10: It is good to note that this widow knew exactly what a man of God needed. A room, a bed, a table, a chair and a lamp stand is all that is required for a man whose life is devoted to God. Be leery of a man who requires luxury in order to preach the gospel, respect a man who needs only a light to read the scriptures by and a bed to sleep on.
- 2 Kings 4:11-17: God repays those who give honor to Him and show mercy and kindness toward His servants.
- 2 Kings 4:18-37: "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though he bears long with them" (Luke 18:1-8)?
- 2 Kings 4:42-44: Jesus was not the first to feed a multitude with little food. See also Matt. 14:13-21.
- 2 Kings 5:1-19: There are many who desire will only accept salvation if it is brought on a silver platter. Many today are unwilling obey unless God speaks to them directly. Some believe that they have to be able to perform miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit before they can be saved. Naaman thought that he needed to perform a grand act of some sort in order to be healed of his leprosy. It is people like this that want God to save them, but do not what to know His will. Those today who seek glory fail to realize that God has chosen the foolish things of this world to bring about the gospel (1 Cor. 1-3). Naaman could hardly believe it when he found out that all he had to do was dip seven times in the Jordan (which is not one of the grandest of rivers). He would rather it be some great and glorious river. One could safely say that the only foolish thing about this situation was Naaman's disgust over obeying such a simple command. Let us learn from this that the only thing that is foolish about being baptized for salvation is the people who are unwilling to accept that it was commanded by God.
- 2 Kings 5:25-27: Sin can blind us to very simple truths such as, "you can't get away with lying to a prophet!" Some believe Elisha was reading Gehazi's mind when he spoke of buying olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants. Gehazi must have been thinking at that very moment about what he was going to do with Naaman's gifts. Gehazi wanted to get rich quick (1 Tim. 6:9f).
- 2 Kings 5:27: The judgment was immediate, as Naaman had been cured instantly; Gehazi had been struck instantly and went out from Elisha's presence "as white as snow." 2. This

disease would be passed down to his descendants. While the guilt of sin is not inherited (Ezekiel 18:4, 20), the physical consequences of our sins can be inherited (i.e., child born with aids, cracked babies, poverty, etc.). Yet, such a judgment might in the end save Gehazi's descendants. Judgment could serve the purpose of humbling his family and bringing them to God. (Dunagan)

- 2 Kings 6:1-7: Understand the importance of returning a borrowed thing back to its rightful owner. Obviously we cannot perform miracles as Elisha did, but from this we can see the responsibility we have to reimburse the owner of a borrowed object either with the original, or a new one.
- 1 Kings 19:17; 2 Kings 9, 10: When God pronounces judgment we can be assured that His judgment will be carried out as He has said, unless those on whom it is pronounced repent.
- 2 Kings 13:14-20: Many preachers today speak of retiring when they get old, but let us learn from Elisha that when a man devotes his life to the work of the Lord, his work is never finished until God removes him from this earth. Like Elijah, Moses, Paul, and even our Lord, we must fight the good fight until the end.

Jehu

Bible Characters: Lesson 27

“Jehu”: Definition is uncertain. Most likely, “The Living.” Possibly an abbreviation of “Yahweh is He.”

Text: 1 Kings 19:16, 17; 2 Kings 9:1-2 Kings 10:36; 2 Chron. 22:7-9.

The story of Jehu is one that has much irony. God sends Elisha the prophet to anoint Jehu as king over Jerusalem (2 Kings 9:1-13). God then commanded Jehu use his authority to bring judgment upon the house of Ahab and those who oppose the Lord. In the beginning Jehu seems to be very godly in his actions and obedience toward God, but toward the end of his life we begin to see characteristics that are not of a godly nature. God wanted judgment on the wicked, Jehu wanted to kill people. God wanted obedience and righteousness, Jehu wanted only to kill people and to do what he desired (2 Kings 10:9-31). We see in Jehu an example of those who get so caught up in the Lord’s judgments that they fail to see His righteousness. Let us learn from Jehu to obey God for righteousness sake.

Lessons:

- 2 Kings 10:1-29; Hosea 1:4, 5; 1 Cor. 13:1-4: God commanded Jehu to execute judgment on the house of Ahab (2 Kings 9:6-7). It is interesting to read however that though Jehu did exactly as God commanded him concerning the household of Ahab and the worshipers of Baal (2 Kings 9:10-10:28), God was displeased with Jehu. Many people may be confused by this because it is hard to understand why God would be displeased with a man who did exactly as He said. It is in stories such as this that we must have an understanding of the spiritual nature of God and the spiritual requirements God has for His people. God was not displeased with Jehu because he killed all those people; rather, that is what pleased Him (10:30). God was displeased because, though Jehu obeyed, he did not do it for the sake of obedience. Jehu obeyed because of the pleasure he took in killing all of those people. God expects absolute obedience to His will, but even that is vain if we do not obey for the right reasons (1 Cor. 13:1-4).
- Like Jehu, there are Christians who will heartily agree with certain aspects of Christianity. In fact there are many who are zealous to pronounce judgment on men who do not agree with them on the scriptures. But when God’s word says things that those people do not want to hear, then they no longer want to follow it (2 Kings 10:19-31). We must be careful not only to obey God’s commands, but to have a godly attitude as well. Consider what we are to add to our faith in 2 Peter 1: 5-7. Every attribute is of a mental and spiritual nature. Sure we are to obey God, but if we do not have the spiritual attributes that go along with it, our obedience is in vain when it comes to the salvation of our soul.
- 2 Kings 10:28, 29: There are people who get so caught up in God’s judgment that they fail to see the righteousness of God’s commands. They take joy in weeding out those things that go against what they want (vs. 28), but when it comes down to it, they are

only doing it for themselves (vs.29). Though God's law includes judgment, our job is not to destroy and remove people who oppose us, but to do what is best for the Lord's people. That is why Ahab and the worshipers of Baal were to be removed from Israel, and that is why the disobedient and unruly are to be removed from the church. Unlike the Old Testament however, we have more of an opportunity for repentance. We must therefore be more eager to accept those who repent than to cast out those who do not.

- 2 Kings 9:34-37: Jehu seemed to be somewhat unaffected by death as we see his unconcerned attitude toward the corpse of Jezebel. As Christians we are to rebuke the unruly and sinful and strive to help them correct their sinful actions. We must be careful however not to develop a calloused attitude as Jehu did. For some, it seems more pleasurable to rebuke a brother and pronounce condemnation than to see that brother repent. When we carry out God's discipline in the church (Matt. 18:15-20; 2 Thess. 3:6; Tit. 3:10, 11) we are to do it out of a concern for the person's soul.
- 2 Kings 10:15-17; Jer. 35:1-9: Consider the Rechabites for even in the midst of an evil generation they show us that it is possible to be devoted and godly.
- 2 Kings 10:31: Even though there are men who seem to do good things in their lifetime, in the end the true motivation of the heart will be revealed (1 Cor. 4:5). Let us make sure our heart is pure and our zeal is for the Lord.

Hezekiah

Bible Characters: Lesson 28

“Hezekiah”: “Jehovah is my strength” or “The might is Jehovah”

Text: 2 Kings 16:20-21:3; 2 Chron. 28:27-33:3

King Hezekiah is a tribute to the history of God’s people. It seems through the Old Testament that faithful leaders were few and far between. Hezekiah was one of those few as is it said of him, “And he did right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father David had done” (18:3). Though he became king at somewhat of a young age (25, 18:2), Hezekiah walked with wisdom and a faith greater than even many of the aged of his day. This is the faith that we need to strive for. As Paul instructed Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:12, “Let no one despise your youth.” Though he was still somewhat a youth, Hezekiah was not one to let others despise him. Hezekiah put the good of His people before his own pride (18:9-16) and he put His faith in the almighty God (19:1-7, 14-19). He did not let the blasphemies of idolatrous men deteriorate his trust in God. Nor did he allow his power to turn him from obeying the will of God. Indeed, this is a man that all leaders, both young and old, can learn from.

Lessons:

- 2 Kings 17: After reading chapter seventeen we see the great evil that the children of Israel did against the Lord God. Notice all the instruction that God had offered the people (17:13, 14), yet they did not follow Him (vs. 15). God punished the people, yet they did not turn to obey Him (vs. 18, 19). Even when they did set up a worship system according to the command of the Lord (17:32) and worshiped Him there, they continued in their pagan worship as well (vs. 33). As the Lord’s people, we who are in the church must take great notice of this. It is not possible to please God and continue in our evil ways at the same time. Many people may think that they are right with God because they worship Him the way He says, but if our life outside of our general worship is not right, then our worship is in vain (vs. 33, 34).
- 2 Kings 18:1-8: Though many people may be satisfied with partly obeying the commandments of the Lord, God desires servants who are willing to do all things that are “right in the sight to the Lord” (18:3). Hezekiah was one such man. Even in the midst of this evil generation (ch. 17) Hezekiah was willing to rise to the occasion as ruler of God’s people. As we noted above it is not enough to simply obey just enough to feel like we are doing what God wants. We learn from Hezekiah that we are to do all that the Lord requires, which includes casting off our ungodly practices (vs. 4). Many of the leaders in the churches today are satisfied with taking the philosophy of “don’t preach on controversial issues and there will be no controversy.” This is not the philosophy God expects of His people. Hezekiah shows us that we must confront the things that divide us (i.e. false doctrines, unscriptural practices, etc.) and remove them from the midst of the people. Only those who “trust in the Lord” (vs. 5) will hold fast to the Lord and not

depart from following Him (vs. 6). When we do this then we will be keeping the commandments that the Lord has commanded us, and the Lord will be with us (vs. 7, 8).

- 2 Kings 18:9-12: “This text repeats information already covered in 2 Kings 17:1-6, ‘with the intention of demonstrating Hezekiah’s awareness of the dangers inherent in opposing Assyria. The passage also reminds readers that the fundamental reason Samaria fell was its spiritual rebellion, not merely its refusal to obey Assyria any longer’ (House p. 360). In 725, Hezekiah saw the Assyrians were powerful, and he knew the consequences of rebelling against them – but he had greater faith and confidence in God! Are we willing to rebel against the sinful culture around us and face ridicule? Are we willing to pay the price of being faithful?” (Dunagan)
- “Here is one more place in the bible where we have secular testimony that confirms the biblical account. Sennacherib, like many other kings, left a record of his own accomplishments, details of his eight military expeditions, including this one against Judah. There he claims to have captured forty-six major cities and an unspecified number of villages in Judah and hemmed up Hezekiah in Jerusalem, “like a bird within its cage.” It is facts like this that prove the inspiration of the scriptures.
- 2 Kings 18:17-37: There are many today to try to persuade men to do wrong, claiming that they speak the words of God. Indeed this can be a powerful tool. History shows us that the one thing that can be more powerful than money and persecution to influence a people is the influence of religion. Evidently this Rabshakeh understood this and tried to use it to overthrow Judah. There are times when men will come into the churches with this same approach attempting to overthrow the faith of the people of God. We, as the children of God, must know His word and must turn our ears from the unfaithful wolves who only seek to devour us (Acts 20:29-31). “But the people held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king’s commandment was, “Do not answer him.” We must know how to respond to those who attempt to overthrow our faith.
- 2 Kings 19:1-7: When men do attempt to overthrow the Lord’s people we must be willing to go first to the Lord and pray for guidance. It is when we begin to lean on our own understanding and ability that we will fail. Hezekiah shows us the benefits of turning to the Lord God for guidance in all things for, in response to Hezekiah’s supplication the Lord said, “Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land” (vs. 7).
- 2 Kings 19:8-19: Some men never give up, but are always trying to overthrow God’s people. At the same time those who are with the Lord must never stop seeking the Lord as Hezekiah has shown us. “Then Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said: “O Lord God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.”
- 2 Kings 19:20: This is one example of how the “effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).
- 2 Kings 19:21-37: Let us understand the outcome of those who rebel against the Lord, for if we choose to walk in the footsteps of Sennacherib, our outcome will be the same.

- 2 Kings 20: “Some commentators see this as kind of a self-serving prayer, but I believe they are misguided in making this accusation. First, the Assyrian issue had not yet been resolved, because verse 6 puts deliverance from Sennacherib in the future. Hezekiah did not want to give the Assyrians the advantage and to leave his people leaderless at such a crucial time. HE might have felt that his death would give Sennacherib something to boast about. Second, if putting his house in order involved naming a successor, he was in trouble because his son Manasseh was still too young to be king. Third, it was only natural that a hard working, dedicated and faithful king would want to continue to serve God and His people. It is alright to pray for length of days, for God honored this prayer. In addition, Hezekiah knew he was right with God, or he had walked before God in truth with a whole heart, and had done what was right. In other terms, Hezekiah’s faith was sincere, there was no deceit in his faith and his faith was active, he had been obedient to the Divine will expressed in the Scriptures. We run into a good number of people today who want to muddy the water and insist that everyone is habitually doing something that is wrong, even the most devout Christian. But Hezekiah disagrees, he knew that he had been walking in the light (1 John 1:5ff), he knew that his faith was genuine and that he had been obedient to God. ‘The king’s prayer is a model for those who are afflicted with serious illness. He fist called upon Yahweh to remember how he had tried his very best to walk throughout life so as to meet with divine approval. This was not presumptuous self-righteousness. Hezekiah knew that he honestly had endeavored to serve God and do His will’ (Smith p. 622). Can we do the same? (Dunagan).

Josiah

Bible Characters: Lesson 29

“Josiah”: “May Jehovah give” or “Whom Jehovah heals”

Text: 1 Kings 13:2; 2 Kings 21:24-23:34; 2 Chron. 33:25-36:1.

Jesus said that “*unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 18:3). When Josiah began his reign as king he was a child, similar to what we are to be like when we are converted. When we look at the life of Josiah we can see how a person’s heart is to be when they turn to the Lord. Children are humble, sincere, and forthright, just as Josiah was. What honesty, passion, and conviction Josiah had for the Lord. Oh that all of God’s people would learn from this man; think of the work that could be done in the kingdom of God. By his intense faith and desire to do the will of God Josiah was known. There was no king before him nor was there any king after him that served the Lord God with such faithful obedience. There is much that all men can learn from this king. When we read the word of God, let us all strive to have the conviction that Josiah had.

Lessons:

- 2 Kings 22:1, 2: Josiah did not turn to the right hand or to the left. Notice that in order to be faithful to God one must go in a strait line; That is, we must do all that God commanded. There are many Christians who feel they are obedient even when they knowingly do things that are wrong, as long as they get at least a few of God’s commands right. Consider King Jehu who did most of what God wanted by destroying the Baals and those who worshiped them, but ended up worshiping some other god besides the Lord God (2 Kings 10:29-31). Today many people are very liberal in their obedience to the scriptures, that is to say, they believe that they do not have to do exactly what is written in God’s word. Let us say that these have gone to the right. At the same time there are those who insist on placing harsh and burdensome requirements on people that are not written in the scriptures (much like the Pharisees, Matt. 23:4). These are those who believe that we must do exactly as God says (which is good) but at the same time add requirements to the law to make it even more strict than what God intended. These are those who claim to be “more conservative than the conservative.” Let us say that these have gone to the left. God desires His servants to go neither to the left, nor to the right. We do not have the authority to bind things that are not written, and we have the obligation to obey all that is written. This is what Moses meant when he gave his instruction in Deut. 4:2. We must strive to be like Josiah and not turn to the right hand or to the left.
- 2 Kings 22:1: The actions of a person are determined by the will of that person. When a person makes foolish choices in their life time many tend to blame it on their upbringing. Josiah’s father was one who did wickedness in his days (2 Kings 20:20) but Josiah prevailed over that influence to walk in righteousness. All men have a choice to do what is right in the sight of God, whether or not we choose to do it is up to us. Only remember this, even an

eight year old boy is capable of walking in the way of the Lord, there is no reason why a grown man cannot to the same.

- 2 Kings 21:10-13: How many people, when they have heard the reading of God's word, are so moved that they tear their clothes because of the conviction of their heart? Too often when the scriptures are read in the homes or in the churches they are read without a second thought by those who hear. There are many who are condemned by the scriptures but are not moved because of the hardness of their hearts. In our society today if a word is meant to convict a person the popular response is to take it as insult. Oh that we would have the mind of Josiah when we read the scriptures and are caught in our evil ways that we would tear our clothes and beg forgiveness of the Lord our God! "*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up*" (James 4:10). "*Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you, says the Lord*" (2 Kings 22:19).
- 2 Kings 23:3: "*Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book.*" How confident are we to say that we have obeyed the word of the Lord with all of our heart and with all of our soul? Few people can claim to have attained this faithfulness. Imagine the great loyalty, zeal and diligence that is needed to be able to serve the Lord God with such passion. This is what God desires for all of His people and this is what all of God's people ought to be striving for. In Eccl. 12:13 we are told that to fear God and obey His commandments is man's all. God's people are those who take this seriously and, since it is our soul purpose, are willing to give their lives to accomplish it. Let us learn from Josiah the attitude that we are expected to have in our service to God.
- 2 Kings 23:5-23: See all that Josiah did to purify God's people, to cause this nation that had gone into the depths of wicked idolatry and filth of the world. In order to purify God's people it is required that we all do as Josiah did but in our own lives. When we were in our sins we were as Jerusalem who had forsaken the Lord God to serve other gods. We were defiled in the filth of the world. But because of the blood of Jesus Christ we have the ability to cleanse ourselves just as Josiah did the people of God. But in order to do so we must be willing to destroy all those things in our lives that are evil in the sight of God. The same goes for the church of God. Just as Josiah removed all the idolatrous articles and men from the temple of God we must remove those things that defile us from the church. Where there are men who teach false doctrines and distort the truth, we must remove them from our midst (Titus 3:10). Where there are evil practices we must be rid of them (1 Cor. 5; Rom. 6:6). We must turn to the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our might, according to all the Law of Christ (2 Kings 23:25).
- 2 Kings 23:26, 27: Let us learn from this passage that no matter how faithful we are to God after sin, there are still consequences for our sin. When we touch a fire, we will burn and scar no matter how sorry we are. When a person commits fornication, they may have to end up taking care of a baby. When a person steals, they may have to end up going to prison. But let us know this; hell is far worse than any punishment we can face on this earth. Fear the Lord and keep His commandments.

Ezra

Bible Characters: Lesson 30

“Ezra”: “Help”

Text: The Book of Ezra; Neh. 8:1-13; 12; 26-36.

Ezra was a man who showed true desire and true zeal for the Lord God. One of the greatest things about this man is that he was not willing to allow his zeal to thrive without knowledge. We cannot speak so well of many of the Jews in Paul’s day (Rom. 10:1), nor of many of the people of today. One thing that we can be sure of is that Ezra shows us what it is to truly seek after God. We must not fail to notice in the story of Ezra that though God’s people had been in captivity for several decades, out of touch with the Law of God for all this time, the people did not fail to follow God’s law exactly as it was written. The story of the life of Ezra shows us that God’s word endures forever and no matter how long it has been since it was first written down, God requires perfect obedience to it. Ezra understood this and by his example he helps us to do the same.

Lessons:

- Ezra 7:10: Ezra was not merely a man who learned enough of the law to get away with a good grade. He prepared his heart to not only learn the law, but to practice it and teach it. To prepare one’s heart for such a task is no small undertaking. To be prepared to fulfill such a task is to understand that it will be a life long struggle and commitment. Little do most people know that this same undertaking (to prepare our hearts to seek the Lord) is expected of all of all men (Eccl. 12:13). Proverbs 16 helps us to understand our need to prepare our hearts to seek the Lord. *“The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord”* (16:1). *“Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established”* (16:3). *“A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps”* (16:9). It is up to us to prepare our selves to serve God. When our desire is only to please Him and to serve Him then He directs our steps in the way of the righteous. But if we have prepared our heart to serve only ourselves, then our steps are directed in the way of the unrighteous. Thus, if we desire salvation, we must *“prepare our hearts to seek the law of the Lord,”* and *“commit our works to the Lord.”* *“...on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”*
- Ezra 7:18: In giving Israel instructions on what to do with the money and riches that the king gave for the building of the temple, Artaxerxes shows an attitude that all who serve the Lord must have. In the first portion of his instruction Artaxerxes says, *“And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and gold...”* Most who call themselves religious will take this statement alone and apply it to their obedience to God’s word. They will say, *“What ever seems good to us in our service to God that is what we will do.”* But little do these people know that in the end God will

punish those who believe this. Thankfully Artaxerxes did stop there. He told the leaders to do with the silver and gold as they pleased, but added something that we should never forget. *“Do it according to the will of your God.”* Thus we must do what seems good to us so long as it is only God’s will.

- Ezra 7:11-27: Notice in verse 27 that even though it was a gentile king who gave these instructions that Ezra first gave praise and glory to God. Not only are we to pray to God for our leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-2), but when those leaders do what is good in the sight of God we must not forget to praise God for putting such a man into authority.
- Ezra 7:28: Like Ezra it is good for all of God’s people to be encouraged knowing that God is always upon us.
- Ezra 8:18: When good things happen to us let us not be puffed up and arrogant, for the Lord causes all good things to come about. Let us rather humble ourselves and give the glory to God, for it is His good hand that blesses us, not our own.
- Ezra 8:21-23: Indeed, we must all learn to *“humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.”* We must notice the faith that Ezra continually shows in his leadership of Israel. Always is his faith placed in the power of God and his praise and glory directed toward God. Ezra understood something that we must never forget. *“The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek him, but His power and wrath are against all those who forsake Him.”* (See also Rom. 8:28)
- Ezra 9:1-6: How often do we tremble at the words of the God of Israel? Ezra knew the Law of God. When it was made known to him that many of the people of God had transgressed His law by marrying people whom they were not authorized to marry Ezra said, *“I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished.”* Today it is a rare thing to find men so faithful that they fear the Lord in such a way. Often, when men find that the things that they do transgress the law of God they do not humble themselves as Ezra did. They do not fear nor tremble at the words of God. Instead they change its meaning in an attempt to justify their actions. We would do good to learn this lesson from Ezra, that when we know we are in the wrong we must humble ourselves before God and tremble at His words. Unless we are too ashamed and humiliated to lift up our face to God when our iniquities have risen higher than our heads and our guilt has grown up to the heaven, we will surely die. Therefore we must *“humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord”* (Jas. 4:10).
- Ezra 9:8-10: Let us understand that for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord, not because he allows us to live in sin, but because He has allowed us to live even though we have sinned. God showed us grace because *“we were slaves, yet God did not forsake us.”* That is to say that today we were slaves of sin, and Christ died for us even though we deserve death. Therefore let us give thanks and obedience to God our Father and Savior.
- Ezra 10:1: Sin is no small matter. When Ezra learned of the transgressions of the people he wept as he prayed to God. Let us strive to have this same tender conscience and desire for righteousness (Matt. 5:6).

- Ezra 10: When we sin let us understand that the only way we can be forgiven is if we repent and turn from our sins. The Jews had to put away their foreign wives, even if they had children by them. Let us understand that no sacrifice is too great for those who truly seek the Lord. *“Yet indeed I count all things at loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ”* (Phil. 3:8).
- Neh. 8: Take notice of the respect and honor that is given at the reading of God’s word. *“And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.”* God’s word is no less important today than it was back then. Let us take a lesson from God’s people in this, for we are God’s people today.

Nehemiah

Bible Characters: Lesson 31

“Nehemiah”: “Consolation of the Lord,” or “The Lord Comforts.”

Text: The Book of Nehemiah; Ezra 2:2

“In 444 B.C. 14 years after Ezra’s return to Jerusalem (Ezra chapters 7-8), Nehemiah also returned and God used him to guide Judah in rebuilding the city walls and in reordering the people’s social and economic lives” (Dunagan). Like Ezra Nehemiah was extremely concerned for the condition of his people and was devoted to doing the will of God. Throughout Nehemiah’s life we see an example of the concern and care that all Christians must apply to the church which is now God’s people. It is amazing to see the zeal with which Nehemiah carries out God’s commands and with which he rebuilds the wall around Jerusalem that had been destroyed 140 years earlier. Indeed we can see in this man the zeal that we must have in our work in the church of Christ. Let us learn from the devotion, persistence, faithful prayer and loyalty that Nehemiah exhibited in his life.

Lessons:

- Neh. 1:2: This questioning indicates Nehemiah’s deep concern for his own people, even those who lived far away. Today Christians need to have the same concern for God’s people in other areas of the world (2 Cor. 11:28). (Dunagan)
- Neh. 1:6-7: Nehemiah knew why Jerusalem had been destroyed 140 years earlier. Neither does Nehemiah excuse himself or his family from the sins committed by the nation of Israel. Anyone who honestly stands before God will see his own sins (Isa. 6:1-5; Luke 5:8). Note, Nehemiah did not blame God for what had happened to Jerusalem, neither does he blame God for the sorry condition of God’s people in Judah. Rather, he knows why life has been rough for Israel, i.e., they had violated the covenant many times over (Dunagan). Neither did Nehemiah try to justify the sins of his family. Often when a person is in sin a few family members attempt to comfort them and justify them rather than pull them from their sin. Nehemiah understood that what is wrong is wrong and family ties do not change that. We must understand this too.
- Neh. 2:1: Some four months after Nehemiah hear the bad news, in the month of Nisan (march-April), Nehemiah was scheduled for his duties in the palace. This was the opportunity for which he had been praying. Note: it had been four months since he had heard the bad news, and his sadness had not been a temporary or superficial sadness. This also reveals how long Nehemiah had persisted in his praying and fasting.
- 2:7-8: Nehemiah seized the opportunity before him and asked for everything he needed to make this a successful endeavor. He asked for passport letters which would allow him to travel without provincial interference en route to Judah. He further requested a letter to the overseer of the king’s forests in the region (probably in Lebanon) authorizing a grant of

timber to be used in reconstructing the gates of the city. Let us learn from Nehemiah to be men and women of prayer, to have boldness in asking people to study the Scriptures with us, to seize the opportunities when they are presented, and to have planned ahead! “If we are impressed with the realism and boldness of these requests, so too was the king. Vagueness, at this point, would have shown up the project as a mere dream or sudden impulse” (Kinder p. 81).

- 2:17: “That we may no longer be a reproach”: “Sometimes it takes a stranger to see sharply what has been softened by familiarity. Nehemiah’s perspective is significant. On the debit side it is the disgrace of Jerusalem’s condition, not the insecurity of the position, which strikes him ---for Jerusalem should be seen as ‘the city of the great King and ‘joy of all the earth’” (Kidner p. 83). This same things applies to the church today. Nehemiah was realistic; there was a lot of work to be done. Yet, how could godly people allow Jerusalem, the city which God has chosen to remain in such a sorry condition? Are we this zealous about seeing that the congregation of which we are members is growing, active, and faithful?
- Neh. 3:5: In every endeavor there will be those who will not cooperate. We must simply learn that 100% participation probably will never happen, but great things can still be accomplished with less than 100% involvement. 2. “They would gladly enjoy the protection of the refurbished wall, but they would not lift a finger to get the job done...they have gone down in infamy as men who would not dirty their hands on one of the truly great triumphs of divine history” (Winters p. 92. 3. Despite such a discouraging example, the common men of Tekoa will rebuild this section and take on another section (3:27). We simply must not allow the non-involvement of others discourage us. “This is a vivid touch, a glimpse of petty pride rather than half-heartedness. The unbending neck is a standard picture of this unbending attitude...However, if the nobles cut a sorry figure...the rest of their community had nothing to be ashamed of” (Kidner p. 87).
- Neh. 6:15: Instead of getting discouraged over setbacks or opposition, God’s people need to realize that opposition will always exist. There will never be a time when everything goes smoothly or perfectly or even when every professed believer acts like a believer. The goal is not perfection; rather the goal is to keep on working despite things which could discourage us.

Esther

Bible Characters: Lesson 32

“Esther”: “A Star”

Text: The Book of Esther

The unique feature of the book of Esther is that it is the only book in the Bible that does not mention God. And yet, God’s providential workings and His ruler ship of even the kingdoms of men is probably more powerfully demonstrated in this book than any other book in the Bible. “Esther implicitly teaches God’s providential care of His people. Vashti’s deposition, Esther’s selection as her successor, and Mordecai’s discovery of the plot against the king and his subsequent reward, are only a few of the many ‘chance’ happenings that are better explained by God’s way of effecting the deliverance of His people from their persecutors” (Gaebelein p. 793). (Dunagan)

Lessons:

- Esther 1:1-2:11: In this book we see God’s providential workings despite some human shortcomings. Mordecai may have meant well, but the king’s ignorance of her nationality almost meant her undoing as well as that of her people. I do not know of any reason why Esther had to tell people she was Jewish, but if Mordecai’s motivation was fear, then the lesson we learn is that God protected and used Esther and Mordecai in spite of their shortcomings.
- Esther 2:15: Esther impressed the people who came into contact with her. Apparently Esther did not place all her confidence in her physical appearance, but was a woman who had inner beauty as well (1 Peter 3:1ff).
- Esther 2:17-20: Esther finds favor in the eyes of the king more than all the other virgins and is given the position which once belonged to Vashti. Yet, even with such a position of power, she did not become arrogant, but still submitted to the advice of Mordecai. “Esther had been careful to keep her nationality secret, as Mordecai had instructed her. From the time she first came under his care, she had been obedient to his commands and continued to listen to him, even after being elevated to the position of queen. Her continued obedience to Mordecai becomes important to the plot” (Gaebelein p. 810). This proves to be a good lesson for the zealous young men and women who are eager to be freed from the authority of their parents. A wise person is one who realizes that their parents have lived the life that they are about to live and therefore submit themselves to their parents out of respect for their age and for the wisdom that they have gain through the years.
- Esther 3-7: We will be condemned if we allow our fears to keep us from doing what is right (Esther 4:13, 14; Rev. 21:8).
 - Having a position of influence places us under a greater responsibility.

- God will work and God will deliver, we have the choice as to whether we will be God's tools in such activity (2 Tim. 2:18ff).
- God does not need us, His work will continue if we do not act, but we will be the loser in the end if we draw back and sit on the sidelines.
- Feelings can be a very inaccurate guide. Esther could have said, "But the king has not called me for a month and I just do not feel that now is the right time." There are times in life when you have to just do what is right, regardless of the circumstances.
- Mordecai was humble when it came to God's providential workings. He did not say, "Surely, you are the person that God will use to save His people." Rather, he said, "And who knows?" "In a crises situation such as this, there was not neutral position. Failure to decide brings personal loss and misses the opportunity to fulfill God's purpose" (Breneman p. 337). Mordecai reminds her that her exaltation as a queen may have been God's way of obtaining a savior for His people.
- Esther 4:15-5:2: Esther does not simply rush into the king's presence, rather, she makes the proper preparations, prayer and fasting. She counts the cost and is prepared to sacrifice her life. She also sees the big picture. What is the use of saving herself, if all her people including Mordecai are slain? Do we have faith like this? Are we prepared to give our lives or to suffer in seeing that God's will is done? Do we say, "If I lose friends, I lose friends," "If I offend people with the truth, I offend them?"
- Today, Christians have much in common with the world in which Mordecai and Esther lived. Christians are scattered throughout the world and often face opposition. Like in the days of Esther, today God does not directly intervene or work a miracle to deliver or act, and yet like the events in this book, God today is powerfully working behind the scenes.

Job

Bible Characters: Lesson 33

“Job”: “Persecuted.” “The third son of Issachar, Gen. 46:13, called in another genealogy ‘Jashub,’ 1 Chron. 7:1.”

Text: The Book of Job

Throughout the book of Job we see the glory of God, the testing that Satan brings upon men, the foolishness of men, the wisdom of God and the power of God through His creation. Specifically from the life of Job however what might be the most dominant lesson that we are to learn is patience. *“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful”* (Jas. 5:11). This man’s endurance was more than physical. He endured the pressure from his wife to curse God (2:9). He endured false condemnation from his peers (ch. 4-37). This being added to the loss of all of his children and land and crops. And if this mental and spiritual suffering was not bad enough Job was plagued with boils and other fleshly diseases. There is no doubt that Job was tempted. Through his trials Job did have the desire to question God concerning this treatment, but when most would have collapsed and complained, “why me, why me,” Job did not collapse. When God questioned Job, though Job was somewhat disturbed by what had happened, he came to his senses and humbled himself before the almighty God. Let us be motivated to do the same, for we have no excuse after seeing what Job has gone through.

Lessons:

- The book of Job provides an answer to the challenge made by Satan (1:6-12). There are people who will serve God even in adversity, for God is worthy of our praise apart from the blessings He provides. May we be such people! That does not mean we will not have questions for which answers cannot be found in this life. But with the book of Job we can learn how the righteous should suffer, how careful we should be in comforting the suffering, and to accept the fact that we can never fully comprehend God’s working in our lives and in the world. From the book of Job, we should see the need to have the faith beautifully expressed by the prophet Habakkuk: *“Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls; Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills”* (Hab. 3:17-19).
- Job. 7:7: Job is able to teach us the understanding that we ought to have in planning our life. *“Oh, remember that my life is a breath! My eye will never again see good.”* Our lives are but breaths in time, but God is an everlasting Rock. Therefore if we establish our lives in Him, our lives will not be in vain (Prov. 16).
- Job 28:23, 13: When we turn to God’s word for counsel we are going to the wisdom of the most Wise. The Psalmist declared that God’s word made him wiser than his enemies,

his teachers and the aged. While many men fail to understand the value of wisdom, Job declared that “*God understands its way, And He knows its place*”. There is no greater source of wise counsel than God’s word.

- Job 1:6-12; 7:17-20: When tested by God many people do not understand why they are to suffer. Job had questions concerning this as well. As we read through this book let us understand that God does not test man (tempt, or entice) to sin (Jas. 1:13). The Devil is the only tempter of men (Matt. 4:1, 3), which temptation men can resist if they so choose (Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9). God does however test the heart of a man; that is He examines, scrutinizes, tries, or proves our heart (Ps. 17:3). God does not test men, or allow men to be tested because He does not know the heart of a man, but because He does not know the heart of a man and He seeks to strengthen that (1 Chron. 28:9; John 2:24-25). Through His word and His providence God allows opportunities for our faith to be tested (examined, proved, tried). These are occasions for the heart to reveal itself in faithful obedience and trustful dependence upon God. Let us strive to be strengthened by our trials.
- As a side note it is interesting to see that thousands of years before man made some modern day scientific discoveries, God had already revealed these truths through His word. Job. 38:16 (2000-1600 BC) God speaks of the springs of the sea. 1930 AD: Fresh water springs are discovered on the ocean floor. Job. 36:27-28 (2000-1600 BC) God speaks of the water vapor cycle. 350 BC Aristotle comprehended the water-vapor cycle and published his “*Meteorologica*.”
- Job. 42:1-17: When we or others face trials in this life it is easy for us to speak out of arrogance things that we have no understanding of. Such was the case with Job’s friends, and even Job from time to time. With Job admitting he had spoken of things he did not understand and having repented, the Lord addressed Elephaz as the representative of Job’s three friends. They angered the Lord by saying things that were not right about God. They are therefore instructed to offer seven bulls and seven rams, with Job praying in their behalf (42:7-9). Let us learn that there is more going on in heaven and on earth that we can possibly comprehend. But the things that we cannot comprehend were created and are controlled by God’s wisdom and power. When we are tested in this life let us always remember that God is in control and so long as we endure faithfully as Job did, we have the hope of something better (42:10-17; Heb. 4:11-13).