

An Album of Bible Characters



by
John
Waddey

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OF
BIBLE
CHARACTERS

BY

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DEDICATION

The author dedicates this volume to Neal and Jane Aspey, beloved in the Lord; whose lives epitomize the Christian Way. They have blessed and encouraged him in his life's work more than they can ever know. I would that all could know them as he does.

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CONTENTS

1.	Aaron, The Orator	5
2.	Antipas, The Faithful Witness	9
3.	Apollos, The Eloquent Preacher	13
4.	Barzillai, The Iron Man	17
5.	The Man Born Blind	21
6.	The Corinthian Converts	27
7.	The Twelve Men of Ephesus	31
8.	Eutychus, The Sleepy Disciple	35
9.	Bible Examples For Modern Man	41
10.	Ezekiel, The Hardheaded Prophet	45
11.	Felix, The Extortioner	49
12.	The Leper Jesus Healed	53
13.	Men of Whom The World Was Not Worthy	57
14.	Isaiah's Portrait of Messiah	61
15.	Michal, A Woman Whose Love Turned To Hate	65
16.	The Paralytic Let Down Through The Roof	69
17.	A Self-Portrait of Paul	75
18.	Peter's Mother-in-Law	79
19.	Pilate's Wife	83
20.	A Tale of Two Prophets	87
21.	Rahab, The Harlot	93
22.	The Shepherds of Bethlehem	99
23.	Solomon, The Magnificent	103
24.	The Syro-Phoenician Woman	109
25.	They Served God In The Days of Their Youth	113
26.	The Widow of Zarephath	117

PREFACE

No more fascinating endeavor can be enjoyed than character studies of the personalities of the Bible. This is now the fourth book from the author devoted to this exciting subject.

From the lives of those gone before, we can learn many lessons, both of things to be done and others to avoid. Great and good men and women inspire us by their noble examples to walk the paths of righteousness.

Our understanding of the Scriptures is greatly enlarged when we take time to learn of the social and financial, the religious and historical backgrounds of the the characters.

Extended research and study of the men and women of the Bible over many years is as close as possible to actually walking and talking with them in their ancient environment, and what a delight that is!

The lessons of this book were first prepared and delivered to the saints of the Karns congregation of Knoxville, Tennessee, where the author has served some 15 years. Their enthusiastic reception and further encouragement has convinced the author of the value of this method of Bible study.

Any preacher will find them useful as sermon material. For those wishing to use them as Bible class literature, I have added a series of questions at the close of each lesson. For those who delight to read religious materials for their own pleasure and growth, it is hoped they will satisfy.

The book is sent forth with the prayer that it will bear much fruit to the glory of the Lord.

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1

AARON THE ORATOR

The world has always admired the silver-tongued orator. It generally takes for granted the back-up man, the helper and assistant. Our subject was a great orator, but today he is largely obscured by the shadow of his illustrious brother, Moses.

About the Man

Aaron was the eldest son of Amram and Jochebed, Hebrews of the tribe of Levi (Exodus 6:20). He was born in servitude in Egypt about 1530 B.C. His sister, Miriam, was older and his brother, Moses, three years younger than he (Exodus 7:7). Aaron's wife was Elisheba. To them were born four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar (Exodus 6:23).

The name, Aaron, is thought to mean "bright and shining". In character, he was a good man, devout and religious. He was a great supporter and helper of his brother, Moses. Yet we see him very weak and timid and easily led astray when out of Moses' presence. He must have been truly penitent for his many failures, for God allowed him to continue to serve and later honored his name (Psalms 106:16).

Aaron's first 83 years were spent in bondage. He was privileged to serve with Moses in effecting the release of the Hebrew nation from the Egyptian overlords. For 40 years he served as high priest of God's people. As founding high priest he helped to organize and implement a religious system that stood intact for 1500 years and survives in part to this day. Our subject died in his 123rd year, about 1400 B.C., at Mt. Hor near Edom (Numbers 33:38). His people mourned him for 40 days.

His Failures

Great as he was, Aaron made many serious mistakes.

There was the incident of the golden calf. When Moses ascended Mt. Sinai, he left Aaron and Hur in charge of the camp (Exodus 24:13-14). When Moses had been gone 40 days, the people grew restless and apprehensive. In a mob scene, they demanded that Aaron make them a god to lead them (Exodus 32:1). He quickly capitulated and called for gold with which to make an image. He fashioned a golden calf like they had seen in Egypt. Aaron made a feeble attempt to maintain Jehovah's worship, but it turned into a heathen orgy (Exodus 32:2-6). When confronted by the angry Moses he blamed the people and sought to excuse himself. He fabricated the unbelievable story that the calf just happened to result when he cast the gold into the fire (Exodus 32:21-24). "Aaron had let them loose and they had become a derision to their enemies" (32:25). Only the timely intercession of Moses spared Aaron and the whole nation from God's wrath that day (Exodus 32:10, 30-32).

There was the episode of the Cushite woman recorded in Numbers 12:1-15. Miriam and Aaron complained about Moses' marriage to a Cushite woman, i.e., an African woman, for Cushites were Ethiopians. Actually, this was but a facade. Their real complaint was that Moses was given the major role of leadership in the new nation (12:2-8). For their act of jealousy, Miriam was smitten with leprosy (12:9-10). Seeing the hand of God's judgment, Aaron confessed their sin (12:11). From the context, it seems he had allowed Miriam to lead him to this situation.

Yet another failure occurred at Meribah (Numbers 20:2-13). The Hebrews were near the end of their 40 years of wandering. Facing a shortage of water, the people grew panicky. They vented their frustrations upon Moses and Aaron. Being provoked and angered at the people, the brothers disobeyed God's instructions and took the glory to themselves by smiting the rock (20:10-11). This rash action cost both of them their privilege of entering the promised land (20:12).

The Contributions Aaron Made

Although Aaron had his weaknesses, we must not let them blind us to his virtues. He supplemented Moses' leadership with his skills of oratory. God said, "I know that he can speak well...he shall be thy spokesman unto the people..." (Exodus 4:14-16). He stood side by side with Moses when facing the hostile Pharaoh and wielded the rod of judgment upon the oppressors (Exodus 7:10-13). Along with Hur, he

held up Moses' hands in the great battle against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-13). He daily assisted Moses in providing leadership for the infant nation (Exodus 24:14). When the Hebrews rebelled against Moses, Aaron stood loyally with him (Numbers 16:3). As high priest, he provided leadership for the religious life of the nation, while Moses led them in civil matters (Exodus 28:1).

Lessons to Remember

Think of the holy pride felt by Amram and Jochebed in their illustrious children: Miriam, Aaron and Moses.

We see the importance of the role and work of a loyal assistant. Moses could not have succeeded without Aaron's help.

We learn that oratorical powers alone cannot help a man to stand in the face of great temptations or fierce opposition. Nor does high office protect a man from the failures of weak character.

How often must Aaron have remembered with shame the awful failures of the past as he sought to lead his people in God's way!

The awareness of his own weakness and sin enabled Aaron to be an understanding and sympathetic high priest. Our Lord also understands our needs (Hebrews 2:17,18).

We must not judge Aaron's weakness too harshly. His years in slavery would have contributed to his weakness. For 83 years, he had not had to act or think for himself. "The sinews of a man's spirit are strengthened by the responsibilities of freedom; they wither amid the inactivity of bondage" (Herschell Hobbs).

In spite of Aaron's weakness and failure, God was able to use him for His glory. His grace provided that which Aaron lacked. Likewise, He can use us even with our imperfections.

Let us be thankful that our high priest, Jesus, is far superior to Aaron (Hebrews 7:11-28).

Let us pray that God will strengthen us to resist Satan's temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Questions

1. Aaron was the son of _____ and _____.
2. His sons were _____, _____, _____,
_____.
3. Describe his character.
4. What was Aaron's role in the episode of the golden calf?
5. Why did Aaron and Miriam complain about Moses' Cushite wife?
6. Name three important contributions Aaron made to the leadership of the nation.
7. We must not judge Aaron's weakness too harshly. Why?
8. Why did Aaron not get to enter Canaan?
9. What lesson impresses you most in Aaron's life?

2

ANTIPAS, THE FAITHFUL WITNESS

At the end of the first century, Christians in the Roman world were confronted with a wave of persecution that threatened their very existence. Among those brethren that paid the ultimate price was Antipas of Pergamum. Christ said of him, "Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth" (Revelation 2:13).

About the Man

All we know about Anitpas is recorded in Revelation 2:12-17. But from these verses we can develop an interesting profile. His name meant "likeness of his father". It was a shortened form of Antipater. While his parents probably did not intend it, the meaning of his name well describes a faithful Christian.

His home was Pergamum, the provincial capital of the district of Asia. It was located near the site of ancient Troy. Pergamum was an educational and cultural center. Her library once numbered some 200,000 volumes, second only to the one in Alexandria. "Parchment" book material was first developed in Pergamum and was yet manufactured there.

His home town was a notable center for pagan religion. A great temple dedicated to Athena was located there. An altar to Zeus stood before her temple. In addition, the local citizens worshipped Aesculapius the god of healing. His symbol being the serpent, worshippers adored a huge serpent in his temple. Pergamum was also the regional seat for emperor worship. Roman law demanded that each citizen annually go to the Emperor's temple, burn a pinch of incense and confess publicly "Caesar is Lord." He would then receive a certificate of compliance. One was not expected to forsake his own god;

just to include Caesar. To refuse to participate was considered a denial of Caesar's divinity and an act of treason against the government. Penalties were severe.

What Antipas Did

He was Christ's witness (2:13). Witness in the Greek means *martyr*, i. e., one who is willing to die rather than renounce the Lord. It is likely that Antipas was a public leader of the church, for they were usually singled out for persecution in order to intimidate their followers.

He lived "where Satan's throne" was (2:13). This speaks of his city Pergamum. It was wholly given over to idolatry. All the vices of paganism flourished there. Satan's power and influence were supreme in Pergamum at that time. Tremendous pressures were brought upon Christians by Satan's workers. Some weaker brethren had compromised with sin rather than endure the hardships. Some ate the pagan sacrifices and committed fornication. Idolatrous festivals commonly included eating the sacrificial meal and ritual fornication, even as the Baal worship of ancient times. Antipas was faithful and steadfast in the face of every temptation. He truly loved God with all his heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37). He kept his eyes straight ahead and turned neither to the right hand nor to the left (Proverbs 4:25-27). He was willing to die rather than to renounce his faith and sell his soul! May we have his conviction in the hour of trial.

Antipas fought the good fight of faith and died a hero's death (1 Timothy 6:12). He was more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37). Like his fellow-martyrs he "overcame (Satan) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of (his) testimony and he loved not (his) life even unto death" (Revelation 12:11). Because of his faithfulness, his reward was assured. Jesus promised, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). He received the hidden manna (2:17); this would be Jesus, the bread of life (John 6:35). He was given the white stone which showed his acceptance and exoneration of all charges against him. He received the new name. Ancient gladiators were given such a white stone engraved with a name. Upon their first victory they received the stone or ivory tablet engraved with their name, the name of their master, and the date of their first victory. It was called the "*tessera gladiatoria*." One who had proven himself victorious on many occasions, upon retirement would receive another stone with the word *spectatus* upon it, meaning that his valor had been beyond doubt.

Antipas' Cause Could Not Be Destroyed

With rage and fury Satan sought to stamp out the growing young church. Polycarp, an elder of the church in Smyrna died in 168 A.D. He was hunted down and dragged before the tribunal like a common thief and was urged to deny Christ. Before the governor and mob, the old saint proclaimed, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he hath never wronged me, and how can I blaspheme my king who hath saved me?" Jews eagerly gathered the wood for the fire, even though it was the Sabbath day. Polycarp declined the ropes to bind him to the stake. He, too, was a faithful martyr.

A third century Christian wrote, "Bassious is in the metal mines (slave labor), Malpalicus under torture, Fortunio in the dungeon. Paulus has been tortured. Victor, Julia (and others) were put death in prison by hunger. In a few days you will hear that I have died the same." Another wrote, "the brave Saturnius, who would not abjure Christ even when they tore him with pieces of iron" (*The History and Teaching of the Early Church*).

Tertullian (200 A.D.) writes, "Go on, zealous governors, sacrifice the Christians at the will of the people, kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust. Your cruelty will not avail you; the oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed" (*The Apology*).

Lessons to Remember

Let us be like Antipas, a faithful witness for Jesus; faithful in the truth entrusted to us; faithful in the work He has assigned us to do; faithful in the holy life He expects us to live; faithful in the attitude and disposition He calls for; faithful to His church; faithful unto death, and we will receive the crown of life.

Questions

1. What conditions faced Christians in Antipas' day?
2. What do you recall about his hometown?
3. What was the prevailing Roman law regarding emperor worship?
4. Define the word martyr.
5. Early Christians overcame Satan with three key weapons (Revelation 12:11). Name and discuss these.
6. What was the "hidden manna" Christ spoke of?
7. Discuss the "white stone" overcomers are to receive.
8. Relate the story of Polycarp's martyrdom. Should we be as intractable as was he?
9. What did Tertullian mean when he said "the blood of Christians is seed"?
10. How can Antipas' example benefit us?

3

APOLLOS, THE ELOQUENT PREACHER

Real genius does not fall upon many men, but Apollos seems to be one of these few. A. T. Robertson wrote of him: "A man who could divide honors with Paul is worthy of study." It is as a preacher that Apollos' name has passed down to us. A study of his life helps us appreciate the ingredients of a great preacher. We read of his conversion to Christianity in Acts 18:24-28.

His Place of Origin

Apollos hailed from Alexandria in Egypt (Acts 18:24), the cultural center of North Africa and the Near East. This city was founded by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. and given his famous name. It was renowned for its great university and huge library of 900,000 volumes (the greatest of that age). One hundred thousand Jews made their home there. Alexandria was the birthplace of the great Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Philo, the Jewish philosopher, taught there. Being the cultural center it was, it became the distribution point for Hellenism, the culture of Greece that had such an adverse effect on Judaism. Alexandria soon became a stronghold for early Christianity. Great teachers such as Clement and Origen labored there. Tragically, it became the fountainhead of serious doctrinal corruption in the third and fourth centuries. The allegorical method of explaining Scripture originated there and did great harm to the church.

Apollos the Preacher

He was an *eloquent* man, says Luke (Acts 18:24). He was a learned man, gifted in speaking power. He was *mighty in the Scriptures* (*Ibid*).

He knew the Law and the Prophets and was an able expositor. A man may have considerable knowledge of the Bible and yet have not the ability to communicate to us his knowledge effectively. One thing is certain, a man can never be mighty in the Scriptures without a broad and thorough knowledge of them. He was *fervent in spirit* (Acts 18:25). He was “boiling over with zeal.” God wants all disciples to be fervent in their zeal (Romans 12:11).

Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord Jesus (Acts 18:25). This tells us he was a student, looking for and accepting the truth wherever he found it. He spoke and *taught accurately* concerning Jesus. This commendable trait is a prerequisite in all who would be teachers of God’s word. There is a constant need for accuracy in our teaching. Paul exhorts us to handle aright the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Apollos preached *boldly* (Acts 18:26). All of the apostles were likewise bold in their presentation of the gospel (Acts 4:13). Timid, fearful souls should not presume to teach publicly. Boldness, however, is not brashness or crudeness. Nor is it ignorant ranting which is sometimes called “bold preaching”. Preaching with boldness is courageous preaching of God’s truth as God intends it. Apollos took his message *into the synagogues* (Acts 18:26). So must we go to those willing to hear us, into their church buildings and their homes.

Apollos As A Person

Although a great preacher, Apollos was limited in his knowledge. He knew “only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25). Yet he was willing to be taught. He was not too important to allow a nonprofessional like Aquila the tent-maker and his wife instruct him in the Lord’s way (Acts 18:26). It is a weakness of many preachers that they cannot receive correction by one of less stature than they. One is never too old to learn. Like Apollos, we should gladly sit at the feet of those Priscillas and Aquilas who know something we do not. Thank God for the finesse and skill of this godly couple who salvaged that great preacher for the Lord. A preacher like Apollos who is always learning will always have a hearing.

Apollos and the Corinthian Church

Leaving Ephesus, Apollos journeyed to Corinth in the Greek province of Achaia. He carried a letter of recommendation from Priscilla and Aquila. Churches today would be well advised to ask for a similar recommendation of those who wish to work in their midst. Many a con-

gregation has discovered that the man they thought was a gift from heaven originated in a different realm only after permanent damage was done. Such disasters can be avoided by proper investigation beforehand.

“He helped them much” (Acts 18:27). Apollos was a church builder, not a demolition expert. What Paul had planted, Apollos watered and God gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). He refused to be a party to the factious spirit at Corinth. Later, he refused to return to Corinth since some were seeking to follow him in a sectarian way (Compare 1 Corinthians 3:4; 16:12). Notice that Paul in no way charges him with being party to their carnal discord.

Apollos the Apologist

Apollos “powerfully confuted the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 18:28). To confute means he argued them down. They could not match his knowledge and his logic. The enemy was stilled. He made his defense (that is the meaning of the Greek term *apologia*) by using the Scriptures to establish his arguments. After 1900 years there is yet to be found a better way to defend Christianity against its enemies. The gospel by its very nature challenges every false religion and philosophy. Those who would be faithful preachers must be “set for the defense of the gospel” (Philippians 1:16). May we never allow truth to suffer in controversy because of incompetence on our part.

What a great man this Apollos was. We need 10,000 of his tribe today. Many good men are laboring in denominational fields preaching some truth but tainted with some error. We all need to be like that godly couple Priscilla and Aquila, seeking out such prospects and teaching them the way of the Lord more perfectly. They can be won to the Savior’s way — Apollos proves it. Are we willing to reach out to them? May God help us to do so.

Questions

1. What do we know about his home town, Alexandria?
2. What are we told about Apollos as a preacher?
3. What are some admirable things we learn from Apollos as a person?
4. Who was responsible for bringing Apollos to Christ?
5. What contribution did Apollos make to the Corinthian church?
6. What is an “apologist”?
7. Where might we find men like Apollos today?
8. What are two significant lessons you have learned from Apollos?

4

BARZILLAI, THE IRON MAN

The story of Barzillai, the Gileadite, is one of the most touching in the Old Testament. The text tells the story of a beautiful old man and a beautiful incident in a far from beautiful time. David was forced to flee in haste from the rebellious troops of Absalom, his son. Without provisions, he and his troops headed for the hill country east of Jordan. Barzillai and others “brought beds, and basins, and...wheat...and beans... and honey and butter, and sheep and cheese...for David and for the people that were with him...The people (were) hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness” (2 Samuel 17:27-29).

All we know about Barzillai is found in this passage and another in 2 Samuel 19:31-39. His name meant “strong or made of iron”. His home was Rogelim in Gilead in the hill country of northeast Palestine (19:31). It was a land of pastures with sheep and cattle. He was a very wealthy man now some 80 years of age (19:32). Barzillai gave far more than physical supplies to David that day; he gave of himself. That is the essence of true giving (2 Corinthians 8:5).

He was a man of *courageous loyalty*. Barzillai did not wait to see which way the wind would blow. David was his king, his long time friend. Many had turned against David and others refused to commit themselves. Barzillai stood solid as a rock, loyal at all costs. He was a friend who loved at all times, a brother born for adversity (Proverbs 18:24). The old man knew full-well what his actions that day would cost him should David lose. But he gladly risked everything for friendship’s sake.

We admire his *generous hospitality*. Barzillai knew what to do with his wealth. He was glad to share his bounty. It was not a matter of constraint; there was no thought of reward. Such hospitality is a virtue expected of Christians as well. We must be “given to hospitality” (Romans

12:13). To so minister to Christ's servants is to serve Christ Himself and will bring its own blessing (Matthew 25:40). Each day brings us Barzillai's opportunities to do good, if we but have his spirit (Galatians 6:10).

This old man had great respect for David's character. It was not a matter of popularity to Barzillai. David was God's man; a good man, an abused man. He deserved support. Even though at that moment he was a fugitive, David's cause was right. He believed he should give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7).

Humility was a trait of Barzillai. When the revolt was crushed, David and his men headed back to Jerusalem. Joyful friends went out to cheer their monarch. Barzillai also saluted his liege lord. Remembering the kindness his friend had exhibited, David invited Barzillai to live in the royal court at Jerusalem. But he did not want to be a burden to his lord (19:35b). To him, his services were unworthy of special reward. It was an honor to him just to serve his king, to walk by his side. His attitude is captured by the poet. "The service and loyalty I owe, in doing, pay it self."

His was a *beautiful old age*. He was an octogenarian. He was not spared the infirmities of old age. His appetite and senses were all failing. Time had taken its toll (19:35). The evil days of decay had come and the dust would soon return to the earth and the spirit to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7). In the midst of these disabilities we see no bitterness and hear no complaint. His outer man had decayed, but his inner man was renewed (2 Corinthians 4:16). Like the roses after the wedding, he had lost his color, but not the sweet smell. There is a mellowness of old age that many reflect. At 25 we are determined to carve our initials on every tree, but at 60 we have closed our knife blades. Barzillai did not use his old age as an excuse from serving his king. While he was able, he was determined to do his part.

We admire his *calm approach to death*. As he prepared to bid David farewell, he expressed the desire to die in his own land and be buried beside his parents (19:37).

Death did not frighten him. There was no running from it, no pretending it was not nigh. Barzillai clearly saw that he was but a pilgrim enroute to another land (Hebrews 11:13). From him we learn both how to live and how to die.

Barzillai was concerned for his children. If he were too old to live in the king's court, perhaps his son, Chimham, could enjoy the privilege (19:37-38). David honored that request, instructing Solomon to "show kindness unto the sons of Barzillai..." (1 Kings 2:7). Everyone has a blessing to confer upon his children, even if very poor. "A righteous

man that walketh in his integrity, blessed are his children after him” (Proverbs 20:7).

Precious memories will follow such a man’s life. Upon his death bed, David still remembered with gratitude his old friend’s kindness (2 Kings 2:7). With the return of the exiles from Babylon, Barzillai’s heirs are mentioned (Ezra 2:61). His works did follow after him (Revelation 14:13).

Lessons to Remember

Great lessons can be learned from Barzillai’s example. God can use us to bless some suffering saint, but only if we are willing to be used. We are reminded of the great personal satisfaction he enjoyed for his kind deeds. We should strive to grow old with the sweet spirit of Barzillai. May the Lord give us grace both to live and to die as this great man did.

“Among the faithless, faithful only he,
Among innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.”

Unknown.

Questions

1. What did Barzillai do for David?
2. What had placed David in his difficult situation?
3. Discuss those aspects of Barzillai's character that are commendable.
4. What lessons can we learn from his old age?
5. What concern did Barzillai show for his son?
6. Before God can use us to bless another we must be _____.
7. What one lesson impresses you most from Barzillai's story?

5

THE MAN BORN BLIND

John's record of Christ's life focuses on his interviews and episodes with people. Each of the seven great miracles recorded demonstrates something of the Lordship of Jesus. In the healing of the man born blind, we see Christ as master over misfortune (See John 9:1-41).

The Cast of Characters

We see the Lord concerned with the unfortunate; taking time for one insignificant man. He willingly incurred the wrath of the Jewish hierarchy in so doing. In this event, he taught his disciples a vital lesson about his new order.

We see the poor beggar under the crushing affliction of blindness (9:1,8). He had never seen the light of a new day, his mother's smile or the beauty of a spring flower. There were no schools for the blind, nor Braille by which to read. There were no "seeing eye" dogs or medical treatments; just the blackness of darkness.

The beggar was the innocent victim of cruel religious controversy. He was caught up in a whirlwind of hostility that set him down on holy ground. He knew little of Jesus at first, only His compassion and power.

We see the beggar's parents (9:18b-23). They were unwillingly drawn into the controversy. Fearing their religious leaders, they refused to get tangled in the problem. How tragic it is when folks fear those they really should love.

We see the Pharisees, the religious leaders of conservative, orthodox Judaism. Their approach to God's law was legalistic. They were ever the opponents of and antagonists of everyone not of their sect. They bitterly resented Jesus. They were ruthless in their treatment of the com-

mon people. The Pharisees effectively controlled the synagogues. They were the keepers of orthodoxy and the watchdogs of men's souls.

The Healing Event

Seeing the man born blind, the disciples asked Jesus, "who sinned, this man or his parents?" (9:2). The ancient folks generally thought that all suffering was a punishment for sin. The law spoke of parents' sins being visited upon their children (Exodus 20:5). Being born with his affliction, the disciples could not see what he may have done to deserve such punishment.

Christ's answer was simple and direct. "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents" (9:3). His affliction was not a punishment for specific sin. All suffering does flow from Adam's transgression in Eden (Romans 5:12), but not always from personal sin. His suffering was an opportunity for God's work of healing love to be demonstrated (9:3).

The anointing: "He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed his eyes with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (9:6,7). Though disgusting to us, the use of spittle was common in the ancient world. Pliny, the Roman author, devoted an entire chapter to the medicinal use of spittle. It was thought to cure snakebite, epilepsy, eye problems and especially to thwart the evil eye. Certainly the Lord did not use spittle for such superstitious purposes. He had at least two motives in mind. The charge to go wash away the clay was a test of the man's faith. Most importantly, however, it constituted a challenge of the Jew's sabbath traditions.

He was sent to wash in the pool of Siloam (9:7). Siloam was an open air pool, 20 x 30 feet in size. It was a landmark in Jerusalem. It was fed by a tunnel from the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley. The tunnel was carved through 583 yards of rock.

The miracle is seen in 9:8. "He went and washed." He "came seeing."

The Investigation of the Crime

"It was the sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes" (9:14). Christ broke their law (not God's) on two counts. He made clay on the sabbath. He anointed the man's eyes and healed them.

The Pharisee's traditions said you may not fill your lamp with oil on the sabbath or snuff your lamp to save oil and wicks. You may not trim your fingernails or pull a hair from your head or beard on that day.

Medical treatment was limited to lifesaving procedures on the sabbath. A dislocated joint could not be set on the sabbath. A toothache could not be treated. It specifically forbade putting spittle on the eyes on the sabbath. Of course, such ridiculous rules were never God's intention in giving the sabbath ordinance. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The sinful attitude of those Pharisees is yet with us and is an on-going plague to God's church and people.

The interrogation was thorough and determined. The blind man's neighbors were confused by the event. They found it hard to believe he was healed (9:8-12). They took him to the Pharisees (5:13). The man himself was questioned by the Pharisees. How could this Jesus be from God and yet break their law? (9:16). On the other hand, how could a sinner have divine power to heal? (9:16b). The man replied, "He is a prophet."

They then interviewed his parents (9:13-23). The leaders did not believe the man's story. The parents really knew nothing about the event save that their son was healed! They feared they would "be put out of the synagogue." The Jews had two kinds of excommunication. There was a temporary ban of a month or so. The ban or *cherem* banned a person from the synagogue for life. To be cut off also meant a loss of school privileges for one's children plus other social disadvantages. This threat kept many folks in line with the Pharisees even though they believed in Jesus (John 12:42).

The beggar was called a second time (9:24-34). They sought to place him under oath: "Give God the glory" (Compare Joshua 7:19). His response was simple: I was blind from birth but now I see. Only the power of God could account for such. Therefore, Jesus must be from God. The man seemed to enjoy prodding his accusers, "would ye also become his disciples?" he jibed (9:27). "Why herein is the miracle," he said, "that you know not whence He is (where He came from) and He opened mine eyes" (9:30). With faces flushed and unable to answer him, the Jews resorted to insult and threats. "They reviled him" (9:28). "Thou was altogether born in sins," they snarled. "We know that God heareth not sinners," he retorted (9:31). He referred to a common Old Testament teaching (Psalm 66:18). His point was, God does not hear sinners; but he does hear Jesus; therefore Jesus is no sinner! Stunned by his words, "they cast him out" (9:34).

From Faith Unto Faith

The Jews cast him out but the Lord found him. He confronted him with a penetrating, personal question: "Do you believe on the Son of

God?" The man responded, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" (9:35,36). Remember that he had never seen Jesus prior to this moment with his new sight. It is impressive that this notable miracle was done without *personal* faith on the recipient's part. This is so different from modern faith healers.

The record traces his progress of faith. First he called Jesus "a man" (9:11). Later he called him "a prophet" (9:17). Finally he confessed him as the son of God and worshipped him (9:35-37). The more we know of Jesus, the greater he is to us. Conversely, the more we know men, the more of their weaknesses we see.

The Moral of the Lesson

"And Jesus said, For judgment came I into this world" (9:39). When a person confronts Jesus, he immediately passes judgment upon himself for good or bad. Christ came that the blind may see (9:39). For a few that meant physical sight would be restored. For millions more the eyes of their hearts will see great spiritual truths. Those who see will become blind (9:39). The proud Pharisees thought they knew everything. Their pride left them in darkness, error and sin. Their claim to know God's will left them indefensible for rejecting Jesus (9:41).

Christ waits to open the blind eyes of your heart today, but you must be willing to obey Him as the blind man did. Go wash in the waters of baptism, and your soul will be healed of sin's blight (Acts 22:16).

Questions

1. In the healing of the man born blind, we see Christ as Master over _____.
2. The fact that Jesus took time for this lowly man teaches us an important lesson. What?
3. In what ways are the blind more fortunate today than then?
4. Why were the blind man's parents hesitant to be involved in the controversy over his healing?
5. Why did the disciples ask about whose sin was responsible for the man's affliction?
6. Who was guilty in his case?
7. Why was spittle used on the eyes of the blind?
8. Why did Jesus anoint the man's eyes?
9. On what grounds could the Pharisees possibly object to Jesus' act of healing?
10. What were some of their man-made rules about the Sabbath?
11. What is the single greatest lesson from this story?

6

THE CORINTHIAN CONVERTS

Paul's mission of evangelism among the Gentiles provides a fascinating study. Of equal interest is the study of the converts he made. This lesson will center on the first disciples in the Grecian city of Corinth, the record of which is found in Acts 18:1-11.

The City

Corinth was the fourth largest city of the Roman Empire with a population near 600,000, the majority of which were slaves. It was the Roman capital of Achaia. In Paul's day it was the most important city of Greece. Her signal role among the Greek cities was reflected in the names and titles bestowed upon her. She was called "the star of Hellas; "the gate of the Peloponnesus"; "the bridge of the sea" and "the lounge of Greece."

Corinth was a great commercial center; strategically located on the isthmus that joined northern and southern Greece, she stood at the crossroads of the Mediterranean world. She was an extremely wealthy city and a center of culture and art. The principle object of worship in pagan Corinth was Aphrodite, the goddess of love, sometimes called Venus. A thousand priestesses served in her temple as "sacred prostitutes" for the many worshippers. Like the ancient fertility cults of Baal and Ashteroth, her devotees worshipped in sexual orgies.

Morally, Corinth was one of the most debauched cities in the world. With such an immoral religious system, there was nothing to ameliorate her morals. Her heathen citizens did not know the meaning of chastity or sexual virtue. Vice was considered a virtue. The very name, Corinth, was a by-word for reckless, riotous and immoral living. Aeolian, the

Greek literary personality, said that if ever a Corinthian were shown on the stage in a Greek play, he was portrayed as drunken.

There were certain cultural advantages in such a city. The famed Isthmian games held in Corinth were second only to the Olympics. Her outdoor theater seated 20,000, while her covered theater accommodated 3,000.

It has well been said that in Corinth, men worshipped silver and gold; drank deeply at pleasure's fount; dined at the table of luxury; wallowed in the mire of every vice; living wholly for the here and now!

The Corinthian Church

The church of Christ was established in Corinth by Paul while on his second missionary expedition in about 50 A.D. Her membership was composed of both Jews and Greeks. Most of the converts came from the humbler ranks of society. "Not many mighty, not many noble" were called (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Some of them had been steeped in pagan immorality beforehand. Paul speaks of former adulterers, idolaters, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards and extortioners that were now in her fellowship (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). In Corinth, we witness the clash of Christian ethics and morality with the pagan world and its standards.

Like all other early Christians, those in Corinth had no public "church buildings." Those came in the midst of the third century. Rather, they met in private homes, schools and halls when it was safe to do so. Often they assembled secretly because of persecution.

Paul's Work in Corinth

Upon arriving in Corinth, Paul struck a friendship with a Jewish Christian couple named Priscilla and Aquila. All being tentmakers Paul lived and worked with them. To find converts for the Master's cause, Paul resorted to the Jewish "synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). When prejudiced Hebrews closed the doors of the synagogues, "he departed thence, and went into the house of... Titus Justus," a Jew who lived next door (Acts 18:5). He delivered unto them "first of all... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried: and that he hath been raised on the third day... and that he appeared to... above five hundred brethren..." (1 Corinthians 15:3-6).

The manner of his preaching is recorded for us. He taught "the word of God among them" for eighteen months (Acts 18:11). He reasoned

and persuaded among them (Acts 18:4). He did his work “without any show of oratory or philosophy” (1 Corinthians 2:1 *Jerusalem Bible*). Later he wrote, “I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Corinthians 2:3). The result of his work was mixed. On the part of the Jews there was open hostility (Acts 18:6). But “many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:7,8). The Jews brought legal harassment and persecution (Acts 18:12,13).

How The Corinthians Became Christians

Paul faithfully taught the word of God among them (Acts 18:11). They received the message taught and believed on the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1,2). Upon hearing and believing they “were baptized” (Acts 18:8). Their baptism was a burial or immersion in water (Romans 6:3,4). When baptized, God washed away their sins (Acts 22:16). In obeying Jesus’ gospel commands they were saved (Mark 16:15,16). “In one Spirit...were (they) all baptized into one body” which is Christ’s church (1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 1:18). They were “the church of God...at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2). There were no denominations for them to be part of. They were simply *Christians*, nothing more or less (Acts 11:26).

The Membership Roll

Among the charter members of the Corinthian church was Titus Justus who lived next door to the Jewish synagogue. The church first met in his home (Acts 18:7). Crispus, the former ruler of the synagogue, and his family soon took their stand for Christ (Acts 18:8). There was Gaius who provided lodging for Paul and later a meeting place for the congregation (Romans 16:23). Erastus, the city treasurer, was won to Christ (Romans 16:23), as were Quartus, Fortunatus and Achaicus (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 16:17). Paul himself immersed the household of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 1:10) and later saw the family of Chloe added (1 Corinthians 1:11). Sosthenes who at one point sought Paul’s harm was later converted (Acts 18:17; 1 Corinthians 1:1).

Lessons to Remember

As in thousands of communities since that time, “not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty” or noble were called, but they who gladly received the gospel and were baptized were saved. They became God’s family in their town, worshipping and serving him through his Son. Will you not do the same today!

Questions

1. What do we know about Corinth?
2. What was the principle pagan religion there?
3. What was her moral environment?
4. What can you recall about the church in Corinth?
5. What was the central theme of Paul's preaching there?
6. How did the Corinthians become Christians?
7. To which denomination did they belong?
8. Name some of the church members in Corinth and tell something about them.
9. What important lesson do you recall from this study?

7

THE TWELVE MEN OF EPHESUS

At Ephesus Paul found a small group of disciples who were seeking to serve God according to the teachings of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7). From their story we can learn some valuable lessons for today.

They were disciples of John the Baptist (19:3). Some knowledge of John's mission and baptism is essential to understanding their case. John's mission was to "go before the face of the Lord to make ready his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people in the remission of their sins" (Luke 1:76,77). John came "preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "Then went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about the Jordan, and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." John affirmed, "I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I..." (Matthew 3:1-11).

John's Baptism

John's baptism was an immersion in water "in the river Jordan" (Matthew 3:6). When Jesus was baptized he "went up from the water" (Matthew 3:11). John claimed that God sent him "to baptize in water" (John 1:33). He baptized his converts "unto remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). They looked for a Savior yet to come (Acts 19:4). They were immersed in preparation for a kingdom yet to come (Matthew 3:2). John's mission was to God's Hebrew people who needed to repent of their sins (Matthew 3:2; Luke 1:76-77).

John's mission was completed when Christ began his ministry, and the Immerser's baptism was superseded by that of Christ. When asked by his disciples about the success of Jesus' ministry, John responded,

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” John likened himself to the best man of Christ the groom. The groom would take the bride and the best man would then step aside (John 3:25-30). It is the words of Christ, not of John, that will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). Christ’s covenant is like a will that became effective upon His death (Hebrews 9:15-17). With the issuance of Christ’s great commission and His baptism, John’s baptism was superseded and became obsolete.

The Baptism of Christ

Christians were baptized upon faith in a Savior who had already come (Mark 16:15,16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). We were baptized into a kingdom that already existed (1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:47). We were baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Upon our baptism we received “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38); we were born of water and Spirit (John 3:3-5); we received the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). We were baptized *into* the living Savior (Galatians 3:26,27). Today there is but “one baptism” that is valid for those who would follow Jesus (Ephesians 4:4,5).

“Did Ye Receive the Holy Spirit?”

Something in the conduct or vocabulary of these disciples led Paul to question their baptism. “Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?” he asked. “And they said...‘we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was given.’” (Acts 19:2). Immediately, Paul knew something was amiss in their conversion. The Lord’s commission said baptize them “into the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Recipients of Christ’s baptism were promised the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). If they had been baptized in light of these teachings, they would of necessity have heard of the Holy Spirit. The fact that they knew nothing of the Spirit was clear proof that they had not been properly baptized into Christ.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian

Christ promised a gift of the Holy Spirit for all His disciples. It would flow from within like “rivers of living water” (John 7:37-39). Everyone properly baptized is born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5). The reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit is the beginning of our new life in Christ (Acts 2:38; Titus 3:5). Some may ask, what does this mean for

me? It is the *bond of our union with Christ*. “Hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13). It is the *seal that marks us as belonging to Christ*. We are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). It is the *earnest of our inheritance in heaven* (Ephesians 1:14). It is the *well-spring of all our spiritual blessings* (John 7:37-39). It provides us *strength for present and future victories* (Ephesians 3:16). The *indwelling Spirit is our hope of resurrection* (Romans 8:11). It is our power to overcome sin (Romans 8:13). It is strength for our infirmities (Romans 8:26). It is help for our feeble prayers (Romans 8:26,27). Surely something so vital and important must be understood and appreciated.

They Were Rebaptized

Having learned from Paul the deficiencies of their previous baptism, those Ephesian disciples “were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). Improper baptism is no baptism at all . . . it is worthless to save, no matter how sincere. There is no shame or embarrassment in being properly baptized, no matter how long ago you received a faulty baptism or how many previous times you were baptized.

Even today, multitudes are seeking to serve God, having never been correctly baptized into Christ. Bible baptism is an immersion, a burial in water (Romans 6:4). Sprinkling and pouring for baptism are faulty methods. Christ’s baptism is for penitent believers (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Infant baptism is unknown to the Scriptures and therefore a faulty practice. New Testament baptism is essential to the forgiveness of sins. It is for remission of past sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Baptism received after one claims salvation or only as a sign or symbol of previous salvation is likewise erroneous. True baptism puts one “into Christ” (Galatians 3:27) and into His body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22,23). A baptism that makes one a member of a humanly originated denomination is of no value.

Some Lessons to Remember

If you were improperly baptized, you need to follow the example of those men of Ephesus and be baptized in the name of Christ today.

One can worship and serve God sincerely and yet be incomplete before Him.

We can make the mistake of seeking to serve God by an obsolete covenant.

May we know and appreciate the important role the Holy Spirit plays in our conversion and Christian life.

Let us never be too proud to be rebaptized if our past baptism was not according to God's will.

Questions

- 1. Whose religious teaching did these men follow?**
- 2. Likely who had taught and won them?**
- 3. What do we know about John's baptism?**
- 4. Wherein does John's baptism and that of Jesus differ?**
- 5. Why would their ignorance of the Holy Spirit indicate they had received an inadequate baptism?**
- 6. Name four things the Holy Spirit does for the Christian today.**
- 7. Why were these folks re-baptized?**
- 8. Under what circumstances should one be re-baptized today?**
- 9. What two lessons from these men most impress you?**

8

EUTYCHUS, THE SLEEPY DISCIPLE

We are continually amazed at the material God chose to incorporate in our Bible. Profound and significant events are often passed over with a mere verse or sometimes no mention at all, while some apparently commonplace happenings are featured. Such is the subject of this lesson: Eutychus of Troas, who fell asleep during Paul's sermon (Acts 20:7-12). As a result of this embarrassing experience, he has become world famous from then till now.

In medieval times the Roman church had patron saints for various groups and occupations. Joseph was acclaimed the patron of the carpenters and Andrew of the fishermen. Someone has suggested that Eutychus should be the patron of all who snooze during worship.

The Life of a New Testament Church

This episode is valuable in that it provides a glimpse of the life and service of an apostolic church. We note that their Lord's Day worship was conducted at night (Acts 20:7). Night services were necessitated by work schedules of that day. Common folks worked from sun up to sun down, seven days per week. Even now, in some of the more primitive societies, working conditions are not much better. Our humane 40 hour work schedules, with Sundays free for worship, are the direct fruit of Christianity.

Their day began at sunset, or 6:00 p.m. our time, hence their Lord's Day began at 6:00 p.m. of our Saturday. The translators of the New English Bible translation tried to help us perceive this by rendering it "On the Saturday night, in an assembly for the breaking of bread..."

The church in Troas met in an "upper chamber" (20:8). Later we learn it was actually the third story of the building. Early churches had

no “church buildings” such as we know. Such came into use in the third century. Smaller groups met in homes (Philemon 1,2); larger groups met in public places (Acts 2:46). Prosperous families usually had two-storied houses with a large room upstairs.

They observed the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day (Acts 20:7). Those disciples knew nothing of monthly, quarterly or annual communion. The memorial feast was the chief purpose of their weekly assembly. While we can deduce weekly communion from available Scripture, church history verifies the conclusion.

Long sermons were preached. “Paul discoursed with them...and prolonged his speech until midnight.” (Acts 20:7). Modern worshippers find it difficult to identify with this phenomena. Most of us have known only 30 minute sermons and some have been conditioned to expect the 20 minute variety. Our grandparents, seventy-five years ago, enjoyed or endured one to two hour sermons as the common kind.

They not only worshipped together, those disciples ate fellowship meals together as well. In Acts 20:11, we see them breaking “the bread” of the Lord’s Supper and then eating the common meal. Jude writes of false brethren who were like hidden rocks in their love feasts (Jude 12). In Corinth, some abused their fellowship meal by coupling it with the memorial feast. Also selfishness had stained their conduct (1 Corinthians 11:20-22). While we surely don’t want to make the mistakes they did, we most assuredly can be blessed by occasions of sharing around the common table.

What We Know About Eutychus

His name means “happy or fortunate”. It was truly fortunate for Eutychus that of all days to have a fatal accident, his fell on the day when a Spirit-empowered apostle was present. (Otherwise he would never have been privileged to read about his experience in the literature of the day). He was a young man who loved the Lord, His church and the gospel enough to be there when the congregation assembled and to stay with them past midnight. That speaks well for him.

Poor Eutychus fell asleep during Paul’s extended sermon and toppled from his seat in the window. They found his lifeless body in the courtyard below (Acts 20:9). Looking at our present day meeting house windows, one might wonder how it happened. Their windows however, had no glass, only shutters or a lattice which would have been opened that night.

Eutychus is most usually used as an example to warn brethren of the danger of sleeping during the sermon. There is, however a more

charitable view of his napping. After all, the hour was *very late*. The sermon was *exceedingly long*, even with so great a proclaimer. A third-story loft crowded with many worshippers could have been hot, stuffy and short on fresh air. The many oil lamps Luke mentions would have competed for the available oxygen (Acts 20:8). The young fellow may have spent a long, hard day at work, leaving his body aching for rest. It really isn't necessary to think the worst of brother Eutychus.

Why Eutychus' Kin Fall Asleep

Eutychus is but one of a great host of worshippers who have felt the numbing effects of sleep weighing heavily on their eyes while the preacher labored to find a suitable close for his oration. Even now charity notes that there are some legitimate excuses for an occasional nap in the pew. A person who has put in a long, hard day of work may have a struggle if he attends a weeknight service. Some brethren who have shift work may unavoidably have to work late Saturday night. They bring a heavy burden with them on the Lord's Day. Rather than rebuke these weary worshippers, I commend them for coming when others with less love would stay home. Some folks suffer poor health, some are on medication that makes them drowsy when they sit a spell. There are occasions when unexpected events rob us of normal sleep. A mother who was up through the night with her baby may be expected to nod a bit the next morning.

We cannot deny the fact that long-winded preaching that knows no mercy has brought thousands to the brink of slumberland. Even short sermons, wearisome and of poor quality take their toll. In fairness to fellow preachers we must say that poorly ventilated auditoriums have probably done more than any other thing to lull the saints to repose.

Reality demands that we take note of some *unacceptable excuses* for slumbering saints during sermon time. Some are weary because of thoughtless use of their time prior to worship. A Saturday night social or late night T.V. movie has left some too weary to worship. Others do not allow sufficient time to prepare for services and the mad rush to get there leaves them exhausted and ready for a nap. We must face the fact that some must lack any serious interest in spiritual matters. They reflect this by their lethargic attitude and routine repose during the hour of devotion. These folks need to be reminded that we must give account for *every deed done in the body* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Some Lessons for Today

Eutychus is a gentle reminder to preachers to be merciful in planning the length of their lessons. Some wise sage once observed that the brain can absorb only so much as the seat can endure. This episode forewarns those who sleep in worship of embarrassing, even serious things that can befall them. It has been this preacher's lot to see more than one brother greatly humiliated from his sermon siesta. For example, there was a song leader who fell into such a deep sleep that the standing congregation had to wait until someone woke him to lead the invitation hymn. Then, there was the brother who fell out of his metal folding chair, dropped his tape recorder and put new life into the rest of the service.

We cannot fail to notice what great love those disciples in Troas had for God's word. We also see the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit vested in the apostles to confirm their message as being from God (Mark 16:20).

We are reminded of another kind of sleep more dangerous than that of the physical kind. Paul exhorts: "...already it is time for you to awake out of sleep...the night is far spent, and the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11,12). "Wherefore he saith, awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee" (Ephesians 5:14).

Awake to life and its glorious possibilities; awake to duty and its splendid rewards; awake to Christ and His saving power; awake to eternity and its near approach.

Questions

1. Why is this episode valuable to today's Bible student?
2. When did their day begin in relation to our clock?
3. Why had the disciples gathered on that day?
4. What do we know about Eutychus?
5. Are there any grounds for being charitable to Eutychus for falling asleep during worship? What?
6. Should we always criticize those who fall asleep in the worship service? Why?
7. Surely there are some unacceptable reasons for sleeping in worship. Discuss these.
8. What does Eutychus' story have for ministers?
9. What kind of sleep is worse than the nap in church?
10. What one lesson most impresses you about Eutychus?

9

BIBLE EXAMPLES FOR MODERN MAN

On the pages of the Bible we find examples of hundreds of men and women who provide valuable lessons for us. We can learn from both their virtues and vices. In this lesson we will notice some *poor examples* we should avoid.

Adam knew God's will and broke it anyway. God had plainly warned him: "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). But when his wife offered it to him, "he did eat" (Genesis 3:6). Eve was deceived but not Adam. God laid on him the moral responsibility for the fall (Romans 5:12). Some folks question how God judges sin done in ignorance. But for most of us ignorance is not the point. When we know to do good and do it not it is sin (James 4:17). Sin is transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). The wages that accompany sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Cain wanted to worship God his own way (Genesis 4:1-8). Scripture calls that "will worship" (Colossians 2:23). He was jealous and violently resentful toward his brother who humbly obeyed God and was blessed. Every generation produces its Cain-types; people who ignore God's word and proceed to serve God as they desire. John urges us not to be as Cain who was of the evil one and slew his brother. The reason being, "his works were evil, and his brother's were righteous" (1 John 3:12). It is an observable fact that the self-willed religious man will often resent and persecute those who faithfully follow God. Their faithfulness magnifies the other's rebellion.

Noah indulged in strong drink and was the occasion of great harm to his child (Genesis 9:20-25). He was the first of a vast procession of human beings who have brought shame and disgrace to their families through use of alcoholic beverages. Solomon warned, "Be not among

winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh; for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty..." (Proverbs 23:20,21). Again the wise man asks, "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek out mixed wine" (Proverbs 23:29,30). While the children of the user of booze will often suffer poverty, abuse and disgrace, "a righteous man that walketh in his integrity: blessed are his children after him" (Proverbs 20:7).

Esau was a profane man who recklessly sold his birthright (Hebrews 12:15-17). He thought little of his family heritage and spiritual blessings. His god was his belly (Philippians 3:19). Thus he traded a rich spiritual treasure for a bowl of pottage (Genesis 25:27-34). We must properly appreciate our spiritual treasures and give them priority in our lives. We must seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). We must "buy the truth and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23). If we turn back from following the holy commandment delivered unto us, our last state is worse than our first (2 Peter 2:21). May we treasure our moral and spiritual heritage lest we be profane like *Esau*.

David failed to respect another man's wife (2 Samuel 3:5). God's law plainly said, "Neither shalt thou covet thy neighbor's wife"; "Neither shalt thou commit adultery" (Deuteronomy 5:18,21). *David's* sin is yet a common occurrence. Paul wrote, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication...that no man transgress and wrong his brother in the matter...because the Lord is an avenger in all these things" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6). Since the home is the pillar of society, it must be respected and protected at all costs.

Solomon allowed his marriage partner to turn him away from God. "When *Solomon* was old...his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with *Jehovah*..." (1 Kings 11:4). He was not the last to so sin. In every community can be found scores of back-slidden disciples who lost their faith and their souls following their marriage to non-Christians. It is for our own spiritual welfare that Paul wrote, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). His advice to Christian widows is good for all. Marry whom ye will but "only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39). We should learn from *Solomon's* mistake.

Ahab trampled the poor to take what he selfishly wanted. *Naboth* was robbed of both his life and property to satisfy the greed of that evil king (1 Kings 21:1-16). He was not the first nor last to suffer so. Pure religion has always included visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction (James 1:27). God promises to judge those who "oppress the hireling

in his wages, the widow and the fatherless” (Malachi 3:5). “But he that hath pity on the poor, happy is he” (Proverbs 14:21).

Peter denied Christ when pressured by his associates (Matthew 26:33-35). He was warming at the devil’s fire (John 18:25). How many modern disciples have bitten their tongue, turned away or pretended not to hear when the Lord and His cause were evil spoken of. Only those who confess Christ *before* men shall be confessed by Him before the angels of God (Luke 12:48).

Judas sold out the Lord for money (Matthew 26:14-16). In every age there have been men who thought godliness was a way of gain (1 Timothy 6:5). Others have neglected or abandoned the Lord’s house in their quest of earthly treasures (Luke 8:14). They, like Judas, discover sooner or later that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil; which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Demas allowed the world to draw him away from God (2 Timothy 4:10). “The care of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22). The broad way that leads to destruction is crowded not only with aliens but with unfaithful Christians who tried to serve two masters. To escape Demas’ sad end, we must “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15-16).

“Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). Let us avoid the tragic mistakes of these Bible characters.

Questions

1. Describe the nature of Adam's sin.
2. What was the difference in the sin of Adam and Eve?
3. What was Cain's fundamental error?
4. Why did he hate Abel so?
5. From Noah we can learn a lesson needed today. What?
6. What was wrong with Esau's trade with Jacob?
7. David's sin was more than adultery. What was it?
8. Solomon's fall came from within his own house. What caused it?
9. How would you describe Ahab's sin?
10. Thinking of the sins of Peter, Judas and Demas, which is the most prevalent in our society today?

10

EZEKIEL, THE HARDHEADED PROPHET

God has always raised up leaders for His work in times of need. Ezekiel was the Lord's man to save Israel through the long and painful Babylonian exile.

The Times

In 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar had deported the Jewish king, Jehoiachin, and 10,000 of his choicest citizens to Babylon to serve the Babylonian crown. Ezekiel was in that group of exiles.

The Hebrews were a broken nation. Those in Babylon were bewildered and confused, desperately hoping for a speedy deliverance and return to their homeland. Those in Jerusalem were living in the shadow of Nebuchadnezzar's sword. Counting upon Egypt's promised help, plans were secretly being laid for a revolt against the Babylonian overlord.

Morally and spiritually the people were bankrupt. They were impudent and stiffhearted (Ezekiel 2:4; 3:7). Idolatrous shrines were found on every high hill in Judea (6:13). The land was full of adulterers, and both prophets and priests were profane (22:25-27). Even Jehovah's temple had been corrupted with flagrant idolatry (8:16,17). False prophets claimed to see peace for Jerusalem when there was no peace and caused the people to trust in lies (13:16,19).

While Ezekiel worked among the captive Hebrews in the Babylonian labor camp, Jeremiah served in Jerusalem and Daniel ministered in Nebuchadnezzar's royal court.

What We Know About The Man

Ezekiel's name meant "God will strengthen." He was a Levitical priest (1:3). His father's name was Buzi (1:3). The prophet was happily married, but lost his wife suddenly in the fourth year of his ministry (24:15-18). As a young man, he would have lived under the influence of the noble Jeremiah in Jerusalem. He was 25 years of age at the time he was torn from his homeland and 30 when called to his prophetic office (1:1). His ministry spanned some 22 years. Ezekiel's home in captivity was by a great canal called the river Chebar in a village named Telabib. The name meant "hill of corn" and suggests that it was a farming community.

Ezekiel's Ministry

His call to be God's prophet came in the form of a breathtaking vision of God beside the river Chebar. Out of a mighty storm, Jehovah appeared with His divine chariot throne manned by spectacular cherubim (1:4-10, 15, 16, 26). Ezekiel needed to know more of the Lord he was to represent, so Jehovah revealed Himself to him; omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, majestic and holy.

His commission is recorded in chapter 2:1-7. He needed to understand his mission, therefore God revealed it to him. God's Spirit entered him, *empowering* him (2:2). Of the *mission*, God said, "Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel..." (2:3). To show his *authority* he was to say unto them "Thus saith Jehovah" (2:4). He was *exhorted* "Be not afraid of them...be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks" (2:6). His *message* was simple, "thou shalt speak my words unto them..." (2:7).

He needed to know more of his *message*, so the Lord delivered unto him His written word upon a scroll (2:8-3:3). It originated from God and was complete, with no room or need for additions. Ezekiel was charged to eat the scroll, i.e., to devour its contents by study and meditation (3:1). Then, as now, God's preachers were not to preach themselves or their opinions (2 Corinthians 4:5). Having made the message his, Ezekiel was charged to go and speak to the exiles. This lesson is essential for everyone who would preach or teach God's word. To succeed, a preacher must seek the law of Jehovah, and do it, and then teach it to others (Ezra 7:10).

The prophet needed *strength* and *courage* for his difficult task, and God promised to equip him for it (3:5-9). His people were hardheaded and stubborn but God promised, "I have made thy face hard against

their faces, and thy forehead hard against their foreheads.”

More knowledge was needed to help him *understand his audience*, so the Lord sent him to the captives of Telabib (3:15). He sat among them overwhelmed for seven days (3:15). No teacher can properly lead people until he walks in their shoes. He found the people to be like briars, thorns and scorpions (2:6).

To do his job properly he needed to know his *responsibilities*. God then explained them to him (3:16-21). He was to be a watchman for his people. God’s word of warning must be spoken to the wicked. Righteous people who turned aside must be warned. Only by faithfully doing his job would he be free from their blood.

Ezekiel’s *method* was unique among the prophets. He acted out many of his messages. The seige of Jerusalem was portrayed on a tablet (4:1-3). The fate of Jerusalem’s citizens was depicted by his shaved hair (5:1-4). It appears that he was speechless for a lengthy period of time and thus had to write or mime his messages (compare 3:26,27 and 33:21,22). His message abounds in allegories, symbols, riddles and proverbs.

Although not appreciated by his peers, he was successful in his efforts. Ezekiel dispelled the faulty and foolish hopes for a speedy deliverance from Babylon. He exposed the deep and chronic apostasy of his people. The hearts of the godly remnant were stirred and moved to repentance that they might be saved. He comforted the faithful survivors with promises of restoration in the future. The prophet kept the flame of faith alive through those long, dreary days of the exile. Like a giant, he wrestled against Jewish degeneracy and heathen pride. “With divine authority, Ezekiel dispelled illusions, denounced false prophets, declared repentance, restoration and renewal” (Herbert Lockyer).

Ezekiel “stands forth as the most powerful figure during the years of Jewish captivity in Babylon...He kept alive in an alien land, the faith which made Israel” (E. Chase).

Lessons to Remember

Not all preachers are cast in a common mold. We must not expect it nor despise preachers who are different from our favorite. The work of preaching God’s message is no bed of roses; sometimes God’s man finds himself among scorpions. The church in every age needs hardheaded preachers like Ezekiel. We need preachers who are content to deliver God’s message. We must be faithful to declare God’s word whether men accept it or not.

Thank God for Ezekiel, God’s hardheaded preacher.

Questions

1. When did Ezekiel live?
2. What was the political condition of his nation, Israel?
3. What was the moral situation in Judah?
4. Of what tribe and occupation was Ezekiel?
5. Describe his call to the prophetic office.
6. How was Ezekiel able to cope with the stubborn, hardheaded Jews?
7. In what way was Ezekiel's method unique from other prophets?
8. Where did Ezekiel's great power as a preacher come from?
9. What two things should we always remember from Ezekiel's life?

11

FELIX THE EXTORTIONER

While the Acts of Apostles is rightly called a book of conversions, it also contains case histories of nonconversions. Felix, governor of Judea, is just such a case. From Luke's inspired record, we can learn many valuable lessons about Felix. Additional helpful material is found in *Josephus' Antiquities* and *Tacitus' Annals of the Romans*.

The Situation

Following Paul's arrest in the temple in Jerusalem, he was sent to Caesarea for trial before the Roman procurator who ruled Palestine (Acts 24:23,24). Felix the procurator placed Paul under house arrest while awaiting other witnesses (Acts 23:33-35). After hearing preliminary arguments by Tertullus, lawyer for the Jewish accusers and Paul, Felix deferred action for several days (Acts 24:1-23).

Hoping to receive a bribe for Paul's release, the corrupt governor invited Paul to present his case before him and his wife, Drusilla (Acts 24:24-26). The hearing almost certainly would have been conducted in the fabulous palace which Herod the Great had built there a generation earlier.

The Cast of Characters

Antonius Felix had been a household slave of Agrippina, the mother of Claudius, emperor of Rome. Claudius, upon receiving his throne, elevated Felix to a provincial officer's post. He first served as governor of Samaria. Then in 52/53 AD he was appointed ruler of Palestine, a post he had occupied for six years at the time of Paul's trial. He was considered one of the worst of all Roman officials. Tacitus said he con-

sidered himself licensed to commit any crime, relying on his influence in the court at Rome. "With a manner of severity and lust, he exercised the authority of a king with the spirit of a slave" (Tacitus). He had a cynical disregard for justice, and open contempt for morality and an unbidden greed for money. He declared war on the brigands in Palestine, but he was more of a robber than any of them. One of his most dastardly acts was to order the assassination of Jonathan, the high priest. His name, Felix, ill befit him for it meant "happy or prosperous" which in nowise describes the man and his life.

Drusilla, his wife, was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I who beheaded James and planned to kill Peter. She was previously married to Azizus, king of Emesa. With the assistance of a sorcerer named Simon, Felix seduced her from Azizus to be his third wife. Drusilla was said to be a very beautiful woman. When Paul met her she was yet in her early twenties. In Solomon's words, being "a fair woman...without discretion," she was "as a ring of gold in a swine's snout." (Proverbs 11:22). Drusilla and her son by Felix perished in the fiery eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 70 A.D.

Paul, the ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), was a prisoner in chains. Although he was falsely accused, and unjustly detained, the apostle seemed totally oblivious to his own hardships. He was determined to save the souls of his hearers. The Lord had warned "beware of men' for they will deliver you up to councils...yea and before governors and kings shall ye be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them..." (Matthew 10:17, 18). Rather than plead his innocence, he strove to win them for his Lord.

The Sermon

Paul "reasoned of righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). *Righteousness* is God's demand for right living both with God and man. To be righteous necessarily involves an appeal to God's law which determines right and wrong. All of God's commandments are righteousness (Psalms 119:172). Only those who work righteousness are acceptable to the Lord (Acts 10:34). You may ask "Did Paul not preach to them about Jesus?" Of course he did. He was determined to know nothing among men "save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). We are made righteous through faith in Christ (Philippians 3:9). Never could we attain such standing by ourselves (Titus 3:5). Felix was unrighteous on every count. Beside him sat his wife whom he had stolen. He was unrighteous in his dealing with

the innocent apostle. He was at that moment hoping for a bribe to release the prisoner (Acts 24:26).

Self-control or temperance is the main difference in civilization and barbarism. God has always expected men to discipline and control their passions. In this area, corrupt Felix had surpassed most men in wickedness. The blood he had shed, the graft he had engaged in, the women in his life, were all in excess of God's law. He despised "self-control, patience, and...godliness" (2 Peter 1:6). To crucify self with Christ was a concept foreign to his pagan mind (Galatians 2:20).

When Paul spoke of the *judgment to come*, we can imagine Felix on trial for his sins, condemned by his own conscience. What a scene it must have been: the manacled prisoner now the prosecuting attorney and the prince on the throne the convicted felon. Paul petrified him. Nailed to his seat, his ears were pried open and forced to listen to his condemnation. It just so happened that Felix was at that very time indicted before the Roman emperor. He would have to give an accounting of himself. His guilty conscience was smitten.

God will judge the secrets of every man's heart (Romans 2:16). Christ will be our judge on the appointed day (Acts 17:21). We will be judged by the gospel (Romans 2:16), according to the deeds done in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10). The consequences will be eternal (Matthew 25:31,32,46).

The Disappointing Results

Felix was terrified and well he should have been (Acts 24:25). This, in reality, was the most complimentary thing said of the man. At least his conscience was yet capable of emotion. Knowing the terror of the Lord, Paul persuaded the governor (2 Corinthians 5:11). Rather than repent, and apply for God's mercy, Felix sent Paul away. "Go thy way for this time; and when I have a convenient season, I will call thee unto me," he said (Acts 24:25). A convenient season is when one can do a thing as easily as not. Such a time never comes to a wicked man. It takes great effort, with much inconvenience, to escape the chains of sin and become a new creature. It is as drastic as dying (Colossians 3:3). Waiting for a convenient season may ease the conscience; may rationalize the delay and yet that day may never come. Actually Felix was delaying in hope of receiving a bribe. He had learned of Paul's benevolent fund for the poor in Judea (Acts 24:17-24). Not every sermon can produce a conversion. A preacher can work only with such material as he finds. Lead will never make a gold necklace.

Felix's career came to an ignoble end. A riot broke out in Caesarea between Jews and Greeks. He sent his troops in to assist the Greeks. Numerous Jews were slaughtered and their property looted. When the Jews protested to Caesar, Felix was removed from office and recalled to Rome. Only the influence of his brother Pallas in the Emperor's court saved his miserable life. Instead he was banished to Gaul (France). Drusilla and her son perished when Vesuvius erupted.

Lessons to Remember

Here we have seen Christian virtue and ethics in competition with the base character of paganism. That Paul sought to save such a gross sinner as Felix reminds us that God wants all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). We marvel at the power of the gospel to convict a sinner's heart (1 Corinthians 1:21). Not everyone goes to hear a preacher for the same reasons. Some have noble motives, others do not. Some men are so wicked and hardened that they will never turn loose of their sins until frightened into so doing (Romans 11:22). A dishonest man like Felix assumed that Paul would pay a bribe for his freedom. It is hard for an avaricious soul to believe someone would do good for the simple love of doing good. We see the importance of obeying God now while the opportunity is ours. The convenient season may never come (2 Corinthians 6:2). The pathway to hell is strewn with good intentions. Such will mock the maker thereof in death and judgment.

Questions

- 1. How came Paul to be before Felix for trial?**
- 2. As a government officer, how did Felix rate?**
- 3. What do we know about Drusilla?**
- 4. What is unusual about Paul's defense speech?**
- 5. What were the three things Paul stressed to Felix?**
- 6. How did each of those three points relate to Felix's life?**
- 7. What is "a convenient season"?**
- 8. Why did Felix suggest that he would wait?**
- 9. How did Felix's political career end?**
- 10. What are three lessons you learned from Felix?**

12

THE LEPER JESUS HEALED

The gospel writers selected and recorded the events in Christ's ministry that typified His concern for lost humanity and the scope of His work. The story of Jesus healing the leper is one of the most touching of all. "And there cometh to him a leper, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And being moved with compassion, he stretched forth his hand, and touched him and saith unto him, I will, be thou made clean..." (Mark 1:40,41).

The Disease of Leprosy

Across the ages, nothing has struck terror in the human heart like *leprosy*. No other disease reduces the human being for so many years to such a hideous and pitiful wreck. Nothing disfigures and distorts the human frame like leprosy. Two kinds of leprosy were common in Palestine. *Nodular* or *tubercular leprosy*. In this, nodules form on the skin and eventually ulcerate. Even the throat is ulcerated resulting in hoarseness and wheezing. The hands and feet are especially susceptible to this form. Head and facial hair falls out. From its onset, the victim can expect to live some 9 years. *Anesthetic leprosy* causes the nerve endings to die. All sensation is lost in the body's extremities. The tendons draw until the hands resemble claws. Ulceration of the feet and hands eventually results in the joints decaying and dropping off. As the disease progresses the whole hand or foot is lost. Victims linger from 20-30 years.

To the Hebrews, leprosy was living death. Moses described Miriam as "one dead of whom the flesh is half consumed..." (Numbers 12:12). Lepers were spoken of as a "parable of death" or a "walking tomb."

Josephus wrote that the law excluded lepers from civil life as being “in no wise different from the dead.” They were quarantined; separated from God, family and society. “He shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his dwelling be” (Leviticus 13:46). There was no treatment, only the long and painful wait for death. No living human being was more to be pitied than a leper. Truly he was a lonely, living corpse.

The poor man was “full of leprosy” (Luke 5:12). He was a walking dead man. His future was hopeless. There was no cure, not even a treatment available to him. Awful limitations were imposed upon him. He lived in a prison without walls. His only associates could be other lepers. If anyone drew near he must cry out “unclean, unclean” (Leviticus 13:45,46). He could not even see his loved ones. He was forbidden to draw near the place of worship lest he defile it by his presence. The psychological pain equalled that of his body.

His *attitude* toward Christ is reflected in our text. He had great *faith* in Jesus. He broke every rule in approaching the Lord, but he believed He would help him. Matthew tells us he *worshipped* Him (8:2). He *humbly begged* for a blessing. There was no demand in his voice. His *reward* was immediate for “straightway the leprosy departed from him” (Mark 1:42). We cannot begin to imagine the joy that swept through his soul when he realized his plague was gone.

The Great Physician

The Master allowed the wretched man into his presence. He did not drive him away, even though he had broken the law in coming nigh. He did not scold or rebuke him for making him unclean. It is impressive that He who made the universe and who had such a mighty mission before Him took time for the lowly outcast. We marvel at His boundless compassion (Mark 1:41). He touched the leper! One can imagine the shock that swept over the onlookers. That which no rational Jew would do, Jesus had done. In so doing He became as a leper in the eyes of the rabbis. But He touched the man in order to save him from his horrible plight. Humanity yet longs for the touch of compassionate Christians, and we should freely give it to them. We see His readiness to bless the suppliant. It is not God’s will that man suffer and die. That is Satan’s work, the fruit of sin (Romans 5:12). Neither is it God’s will that any perish, rather He wants all to be saved (2 Peter 3:9).

We stand in awe at the Lord’s *great power* to heal. “Straightway the leprosy departed from him” (Mark 1:42). He has all power in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He healed all manner of disease and sickness (Matthew 4:23). How remarkably different was Jesus’ miracle

of healing from that of modern day “faith healers.” They cannot heal leprosy or any other organic illness. Their pretended cures take weeks or months. What they claim is a miracle is the body’s natural regenerative power at work. Those allegedly healed by the “faith healers” frequently have relapses into their old illness. The difference is in genuine and counterfeit miracles.

Christ showed the highest respect for God’s law. He charged the man to “go show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing the things which Moses commanded” (Mark 1:44). “The law of the leper” must be observed (Leviticus 14:1-9). Love for and faithful obedience to God’s law is the hallmark of every true disciple (Hebrews 5:9).

The Unusual Charge

“And Jesus saith unto him, “See thou tell no man...” (Matthew 8:4). This prohibition has puzzled Bible students through the ages. Perhaps He did not want people to throng Him just for physical healing and thus defeat His greater spiritual mission. It is entirely possible that He wished not to attract the hostile attention of the legalistic Pharisees who would accuse Him of uncleanness for touching the leper. The results of the man’s disobedience demonstrated the reasonableness of the charge.

“But he went out, and began to publish it much and to spread abroad the matter...” (Mark 1:45). Because of his joyful indiscretion, “Jesus could no more openly enter into a city, but was without in desert places.” The cities with their teeming masses suffered from his disobedience, no matter how well intended. Many souls were denied their opportunity to see and hear their Savior. It was a strange paradox. Jesus touched the leper and brought him into the city. By his actions the man drove Christ from the city to the desert. We must obey Jesus even in those small details which we may not understand!

Lessons to Remember

This poor leper represents the human race, cursed by the leprosy of sin. We see the analogy of leprosy to sin in its mysterious origin; its slight beginning; its painlessness in early stages; the slowness of its growth; its power to alienate one from all that is good; its relentless progress; its suffering and hideousness in its final stages and its likeness to living death. We yet have our leprosies among us: alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution and homosexuality.

We learn that for the worst of difficulties there is a solution; if not physical then spiritual. Christ is the source of divine help and healing. There is none other to turn to (John 6:68). We are halfway to the cure when we learn where to find the remedy.

Compassion is the heart of true Christianity. All the scholarship, elocution or soundness of faith and practice are but a hollow shell without human kindness (Matthew 22:37-39).

May our testimony for Christ be a blessing and not a curse to His cause. How sad when the friends of Christ and those who have been blessed, rob others of their hope of salvation by thoughtless words and deeds.

Christ will heal our leper's spots, if we come as this man did and faithfully do his bidding.

Questions

- 1. What do you know about leprosy?**
- 2. Are people still faced with this plague?**
- 3. How did the Hebrews view leprosy?**
- 4. How bad was this man's condition?**
- 5. What did you learn of his attitude toward Jesus?**
- 6. Why was Jesus' conduct so shocking to the onlookers?**
- 7. In what ways was Jesus' miracle of healing different from that of modern "faith healers"?**
- 8. Why did he command the leper to go to the priest?**
- 9. Why would Jesus charge him to tell no man of his healing?**
- 10. What valuable lessons have you learned from this story?**

13

MEN OF WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY

Wise men are always keen observers of human conduct. We can profit greatly from the lives of those who have gone before us. In this lesson we will note some positive examples of great men of faith whose actions are commendable for us.

Abel worshipped God as he directed. It was “by faith” that he offered a more acceptable sacrifice (Hebrews 11:4). But faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Therefore, he heard and obeyed God in offering the firstlings of his flock (Genesis 4:4). God blessed him for his faithful obedience. Christ expects us today to do the will of the Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21). In addition we must not go beyond the things written in God’s book (1 Corinthians 4:6). To do so will cost us the fellowship and approval of God and His Son (2 John 9-11).

Enoch spent his life walking with God (Genesis 5:24). It was “by faith *Enoch* was translated that he should not see death” (Hebrews 11:5). Without the same kind of loving, trusting, obeying faith we cannot be well-pleasing unto God. “For he that cometh unto God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him” (Hebrews 11:6). To walk with God means to live one’s life in harmony with His revealed will. “If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son, cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:6,7). If we walk with God all of our days, He will take us home to glory as well (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Noah raised his family for God and saved them from the judgment of the wicked (Genesis 6:9,10; 7:23). His was surely the vilest generation of all time, yet he was successful in his family. In a generation that knows no end to corruption and vice, we desperately need godly

fathers who will nurture their children in the chastening and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). No man is a failure if he, like Noah, can save his own family. No man is a success if he loses his loved ones; no matter how far he may excel in other areas.

Noah obeyed God even when the task assigned seemed insurmountable. No doubt his worldly neighbors laughed him to shame when they viewed his project or heard his preaching. Yet being “moved with godly fear, (he) prepared an ark to the saving of his house...” (Hebrews 11:7). This is saving faith!

Joseph resisted temptation when his master’s wife sought to seduce him (Genesis 39:7-12). Even though he suffered painful consequences from that slighted woman, he never regretted his decision. He said, “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” It is still best to “flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Lust is powerful and the flesh is weak. It is difficult to talk over the question of adultery and end up on God’s side.

Joseph forgave those who sinned against him. We wonder at the great forgiving spirit he manifested toward those who ruthlessly sold him into slavery (Genesis 45:4,5). Paul urges us to be “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). What a happy world it would be if such loving forgiveness grew in every heart.

Nathan had the courage to correct a king that had done wrong. When king David sinned in taking Uriah’s wife and causing his death, Nathan stood before him and courageously said, “Thou art the man” (2 Samuel 12:1-8). In those days kings had absolute power — even life and death power over their subjects. Nathan knew that his king could speak the word and imprisonment or death would befall him. Yet he did what had to be done. A true prophet of God must speak the truth and lie not (Ephesians 4:25). Truth must be spoken whether the occasion is convenient or not (2 Timothy 4:2). Like Paul we must be prepared to declare the whole counsel of God and hold back nothing profitable from those who need it (Acts 20:20,27).

Josiah served the Lord in his youth. “While he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David” (2 Chronicles 34:3). This young man not only served God himself, he led his nation in a great religious reformation. He purged the pagan element from his land and taught the people to worship Jehovah correctly (2 Kings 2:3). His noble example reminds youth of every age to remember their Creator in the days of their youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Ezra loved God’s word and diligently studied it. This man of God helped to restore the Hebrew nation to their homeland after the Bab-

ylonian exile. He also was instrumental in beginning the reconstruction of God's temple (Ezra 1:2). Perhaps his greatest contribution was in writing scripture. Jewish tradition credits him with authoring the great 119th Psalm and with formulating the canon of their sacred books. "Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances" (Ezra 7:10). Every teacher of God's word should follow Ezra's example to first learn and practice himself, before attempting to teach others. "Great peace have they that love thy law" (Psalms 119:165).

Barnabas knew how to encourage brethren to do the right thing. "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith..." (Acts 11:24). His brethren called him the son of exhortation. He took the part of Saul to gain his acceptance with the apostles at Jerusalem (Acts 9:26,27). He helped the church in Antioch grow to maturity. He salvaged young John Mark and helped him grow into a great leader (Acts 15:37-39). We must learn to "exhort one another, and build each other up, even as" Barnabas did (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

John risked all to follow Jesus even in the face of death. He stood at the foot of the cross and took Christ's mother under his protection (John 19:26,27). Others fled — but not faithful John. Jesus promised, "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters...with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:30). May we grow in faith that we, like John, will never deny our Lord.

What great value there is in these wonderful examples. Let us teach them to our children and emulate them in our lives.

Questions

1. Abel sacrificed by faith. What does that mean?
2. What is the meaning of Enoch *walking* with God?
3. If Noah could raise his children to be faithful, what does that say to us?
4. How would your neighbors react if you began an “ark” project in your back yard?
5. Joseph’s example teaches us two great lessons. Name them.
6. Why did Nathan’s deed demand such courage?
7. What contribution did Ezra make to his fellow Hebrews?
8. Every church needs a Barnabas. What did he do that was so helpful?
9. What event shows us how much Jesus thought of John?

14

ISAIAH'S PORTRAIT OF MESSIAH

Isaiah is preeminently the messianic prophet. Among his most spectacular predictions is in chapter 9:6,7.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with the justice and with righteousness from henceforth, even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.”

God looked at the needs of a sin-cursed race and sent the needed provision. We needed wisdom; Christ is our Counselor. We needed reconciliation to God; He is our peace. We needed help for life's calamities; He is our mighty God. We needed provision and comfort; He is the Father of Eternity.

I. “*A child is born.*” His mode of coming into the world is announced. He would not come as a descending angel or conquering king. He came as a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes (Luke 2:11,12). In this we see His humiliation, as the mighty Word of God emptied Himself and took the form of a servant and the limitations of a man (Philippians 2:5-8). His incarnation was essential in order to “bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

II. “*A son is given.*” Not just a child, but a *man* child was specified. A son, not of an earthly father but of the Heavenly Father (Luke 1:35). In an earlier verse he had predicted the son would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). These unique circumstances of his birth would prove that he was Immanuel, i.e., God with us. Of this child the Psalmist sang, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever” (Psalms 45:6; Hebrews 1:8).

III. “*The government shall be upon his shoulder.*” Messiah would

reign as king over God's kingdom. Thus today all the saved are translated into the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13). The burden of authority would rest upon His shoulders. Thus, Christ is head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22) and has all the authority (Matthew 28:18).

IV. "*His name shall be called wonderful*" or wondrous. Messiah is wondrous in His nature for He is divine God (John 1:1-3,14). He is likewise perfect in manhood (1 Peter 2:22). Truly, He was "God manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). He is wondrous in His offices. He alone combined in Himself the three sacred offices of Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15), Priest (Hebrews 7:25-26) and King (1 Timothy 6:15). He is wondrous in His relationships with us. He shares in our flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14). He is a savior to all who believe (Matthew 1:21). He is a friend unlike all others (John 15:13,14). He invites us to jointly share His eternal inheritance (Romans 8:16,17).

V. "*Counsellor.*" Man, blinded by sin, desperately needed a wise counsellor. We could not direct our own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). No man ever spoke as wisely as Jesus. "The Spirit of Jehovah (rested) upon him, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah" (Isaiah 11:2).

VI. "*Mighty God.*" Our Christ reflects the same divine nature as His Father (Isaiah 7:14). "All the fullness of the Godhead" dwells in Him bodily (Colossians 2:9). Paul affirms that our Lord existed "on an equality with God" before He came to dwell among us. With Thomas every redeemed soul must confess Him as "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28). To accomplish His mission, the Son could be no less than Deity. As God and Savior He redeemed lost mankind (Titus 2:14). He "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). This no creature could do. He vanquished sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:25,26). To accomplish that feat he had to triumph over Satan (Hebrews 2:14). No less than the power of God could accomplish these awesome feats. It is no wonder that Satan and his tribe have worked unceasingly to discredit Christ's claim to Deity. Pity those who accept the lie!

VII. "*Everlasting Father.*" This name has troubled many. The footnote has it, "The Father of Eternity." Others have translated it "the Father of perpetuity" or "the Father of the forever." The significance of this thought is that Christ is the creator of all existing things (Colossians 1:16). He is the master and ruler of all. He is the sustainer of the universe and all living things (Colossians 1:17). Let us not blush to ascribe this title to our Lord. In so doing we do not dishonor His Father and ours.

VIII. *“Prince of Peace.”* Worldly kings establish themselves by the sword, His kingdom is founded upon peace. Christ removed the cause of war and strife: *sin*. He reconciled man with God (Romans 5:1); with Himself (Philippians 4:7) and with his fellowman (Ephesians 2:16). Jesus first *procured* peace, then *proclaimed* peace (Ephesians 2:17). He imparts peace (John 20:10), He maintains peace and He perfects peace. Let us adore the Prince of Peace.

IX. *“Of the increase of his government there shall be no end.”* His is an eternal kingdom (Daniel 2:44). The extent of His reign daily grows as each new heart is won (Luke 17:21). One day, all His enemies will be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). No power on earth or in hell is sufficient to destroy Christ’s kingdom.

X. *“On the throne of David.”* The prophets foretold that Christ would reign on David’s throne. The angel that announced His conception said, “The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever...” (Luke 1:32,33). This was promised to David 3,000 years ago (2 Samuel 7:12,13). It is regrettable that premillennialists have not yet perceived this important fact.

XI. *“With justice and righteousness.”* This is the *nature* of His reign. How unlike the administrations of earthly kings and rulers. No man need fear unfair treatment at the hands of our king.

XII. *“The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.”* Here is the divine guarantee of its success. With a holy jealousy He guards His name, His word and His cause. Many human purposes fail because men lack the earnest zeal and devotion to carry through, or they lack the power to accomplish their goal. The omnipotent Jehovah can never be deterred. His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

All of this is given “unto us.” A promise and a pledge; all in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us love and serve Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Questions

1. What lesson is manifested in Jesus' birth?
2. What demanded the incarnation of Jesus?
3. When did or will Christ begin His reign over His kingdom?
4. In what sense is Christ's name "Wonderful"?
5. How can Christ be "Mighty God"?
6. Do other Scriptures call Christ God? If so, which?
7. What is the meaning of Christ being "Everlasting Father"?
8. If Christ is the Prince of Peace, why do we yet have wars?
9. What guarantee did Isaiah offer that his great prophecy would be fulfilled?
10. Portraits are for viewing. Christ is a person we may possess as our Lord. Have you made Him your Savior?

15

MICHAL, A WOMAN WHOSE LOVE TURNED TO HATE

This is a story about a princess who fell in love with and married a shepherd boy. To some it may seem like a storybook romance, but sadly they did not live happily ever after. “Saul gave (David) Michal his daughter to wife...and Michal, Saul’s daughter, loved him” (1 Samuel 18:27,28).

Michal’s Early Life. Of her family we read: “the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Ishvi, and Malchishua; and the names of his two daughters were...Merab and...Michal: and the name of Saul’s wife was Ahinoam...” (1 Samuel 14:49-52). Her father, Saul, suffered from serious mental disorders. To alleviate his emotional distress, David the son of Jesse was brought to play the harp before Him. “And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took the harp, and played...so Saul was refreshed, and was well...” (1 Samuel 16:23). Such a therapy session was likely Michal’s first occasion for meeting David.

Her First Love. Our story opens in the court of the neurotic king who finds solace in the music of the young minstrel. His princess daughter, in the background, feasts her eyes and ears and falls in love. David was a hero in battle, a gifted poet, singer and musician. In the world of romance, these are an irresistible combination. Unfortunately, Michal’s beloved was betrothed to her older sister, Merab (1 Samuel 18:17). Before the marriage, however, her fickle father gave her sister to another man (1 Samuel 18:19). At that point Saul promised Michal to David (1 Samuel 18:25). It was not that he cared for her happiness, rather he used her to lay a snare for David’s life. The dowry her father asked was the lives of 100 Philistines, fully expecting David to be killed in the attempt (1 Samuel 18:25). David met the challenge, and they

were wed in a way doubtless suited to a king's daughter. Michal's heart was torn between loyalty to her father and her husband.

Love Separated. Because of Saul's determination to destroy him, David was forced to flee his home and live a fugitive's life (1 Samuel 19:11). Michal aided David's escape by letting him down through a window. She then placed a dummy in his bed and told the arresting officers that her husband was sick in bed (1 Samuel 19:12,13). For a number of years, David and his beloved were separated; first while a fugitive in the hills and then the seven and a half years of hostility between David and the house of Saul. In that interim, her father gave her to be the wife of one Palti of Gallim (1 Samuel 25:44). Palti loved her dearly and wept bitterly when David reclaimed her (2 Samuel 3:12-16).

The Reunion. When the northern tribes would unite with David, he stipulated that Michal be first returned (2 Samuel 3:18). But time had changed things. Long periods of separation tend to make vast changes in the parties involved, for people never remain the same. When they had parted, they were deeply in love. She was then the princess daughter of a powerful king; he was a poor shepherd turned fugitive. When they next met, she was the daughter of a dead, disgraced king and the wife of a nobody; he was the heroic king of the land. Before, she had been his only beloved, now she was to be part of a polygamus family (1 Samuel 25:43). She was not used to sharing her life with a man who had so many duties and responsibilities. She could not accept it.

Love Turned to Despite. Having captured and secured the ancient city of Jerusalem and made it his capital, David planned to bring the ark of God into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:12-16). For the whole nation it was a day of great joy and festivity. Being an occasion of state, the king and his family would be leading participants. David laid aside his royal robes and dressed in a linen ephod like the priests. By doing this, he joined the celebration as a commoner before God. In his joyful enthusiasm, David joined in the festive dancing of the parade. Such religious dancing was common among the ancients and not wrong (Exodus 15:20; Ecclesiastes 3:4).

Michal did not join the happy throng celebrating the arrival of God's ark. Her father had shown no interest in the ark, nor did she. Alone, she watched from her window as the parade proceeded through the streets. When she saw her husband joyfully dancing with the masses, she *despised* him in her heart (2 Samuel 6:16).

The Death of a Marriage. When the festivities were completed, David returned home to bless his family (2 Samuel 6:20a). Michal met him at

the door with scornful rebukes. "How glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids...as one of the vain fellows shameless uncovereth himself." Sarcasm dripped from her greeting. She felt his actions were beneath the dignity of the king. Her father had never done so.

Michal had no valid grounds for despising David's actions. Actually she resented the noblest part of his life. She had no appreciation for David's religious emotions because she did not share his love for Jehovah. Her action and attitude is understood if we remember the terephim (image) she hid in David's bed years before (1 Samuel 19:13). At heart she was a pagan, not a loyal servant and worshipper of Jehovah. Michal had loved and adored David when he was poor and unknown, but now that he was great, she despised him.

David's determined response was admirable. He replied, "It was before Jehovah who chose me...to appoint me prince over Israel: therefore will I play before Jehovah" (1 Samuel 6:21). He refused to allow her to dampen his zeal for his God. He reminded her it was not her, but God he had danced for that day. The king reasoned that God had evidently approved of his conduct since He had given him the kingdom of her father, rather than the natural heirs (2 Samuel 6:21). He observed that his citizens among whom he danced had appreciated him, even if she had not. It is noteworthy that David did not rage at or beat Michal for her insolence. We are told that Michal died childless (2 Samuel 6:23). Her marriage died that day. This seems to imply that all intimacy ceased between them from that time onward.

Lessons to Remember

Some Lessons From Michal. We learn the sad truth that they who have been the chief joy of our lives can become the cause of our bitterest sorrow. We see the importance of choosing a mate who shares our love for God and His kingdom (2 Corinthians 6:14). Love like Michal's is unsuited for a happy marriage. She only loved the hero, the musician, the king; not the humble servant of God. She is a bad example of a mate who either cannot or will not enter into the religious conviction and practice of their mate.

The carnal mind cannot appreciate the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:4). Michal could not understand David any more than Judas could understand Mary, who anointed Jesus with the precious ointment (John 12:3-6).

Michael had not learned to reverence her husband (Ephesians 5:33). This is a difficult command in a day of women's liberation. Such respect

for a husband cannot occur at a command, even a divine one. It must first be a learned attitude and then a practice. David had to go out of his wife's presence to find respect and appreciation. Pity other wives whose husbands must do the same.

From David we learn how to respond to those who provoke us. When we are reviled, revile not again (1 Peter 2:23). We must pray for them that despitefully use us (Matthew 5:44). We need to consider their lack of knowledge (Luke 23:24). We must endure to the end if we would be saved (Matthew 24:13).

Let us be thankful for our loving, supportive mates (Colossians 2:17), and remember to pray for those not so fortunate, whose cross is hard to bear.

What a tragic story Michal offers. It began with a young girl deeply in love with her hero. It ended with a harsh-talking woman berating and despising her godly husband. May her story not be repeated in our lives.

Questions

1. Who was Michal's father?
2. What was the situation that brought David into her home?
3. Why did Saul promise to give Michal to David in marriage?
4. How did Michal aid her husband in fleeing her father's wrath?
5. How had David and Michal's relationship changed over the years of separation?
6. What was the occasion that prompted Michal's bitter criticism of her husband?
7. What (if any) wrong was David guilty of that day?
8. Why do you think Michal was in her home at the time she saw David and despised him?
9. Discuss David's response to his wife's ugly criticism.
10. What lessons can we learn about husband-wife relations from this story?

16

THE PARALYTIC LET DOWN THROUGH THE ROOF

The popular song “Vincent” of a few years ago spoke of “frameless faces hung on nameless walls.” The Bible is filled with stories of hundreds of nameless characters whose deeds or experiences contain vital lessons for us today. Such a one is the paralytic victim whom four friends brought to Jesus for healing (Mark 2:1-12).

The Setting

This event occurred at Capernaum in the early days of Jesus’ ministry. It is thought by some that it was Peter’s home where it happened. Christ spent time there on other occasions. Mark’s account reflects an eyewitness account. It is generally held that Mark gained much of his information from Peter, who could have been that eyewitness (1 Peter 5:13).

Palestinian homes were small. They were often built around an open courtyard. There was frequently a larger upper room suitable for gatherings. Doors opened directly onto the streets. Roofs were flat and regularly used. A stairway to the roof was located on the outside, making easy access. Windows were small, usually about 18 inches in diameter. This would explain why they could not gain entrance by a window.

Roofs were constructed with beams spaced about 3 feet apart. These were covered with reeds, branches and grass, with a final covering of sunbaked mud. Such a roof could be easily broken up and a hole made.

The Cast of Characters

The Great Physician of this episode was the Lord Jesus. He was busy teaching the gospel. Though He was involved with a large crowd, He had time for one insignificant man. We marvel at His great compassion and sympathy.

All we know of the sick man is revealed in these short lines. Even his name is unknown. His condition was pitiful. He suffered from severe palsy and was hopelessly paralyzed. He had to be carried by others. He was evidently a young man, for Jesus used a Greek term that means child. In that culture, one was considered young until age 30. It is remarkable that none of the three records indicate that he spoke a single word throughout the whole exciting episode.

The four friends were genuinely concerned about the poor man's plight and were willing to do something about it. They brought him to Jesus. They risked much and went to great and unusual effort to get the job done. (If you have problems seeing the "risk", just try tearing a hole in your neighbor's roof.) These men had faith in large proportions.

There were the ever present critics of the Lord: the Pharisees and doctors of the law (Luke 5:17). They had come from the villages of Galilee and Judea and even from far away Jerusalem. The record reveals that they had not come to learn, but to seek some accusation against Him (John 8:6). This might explain the rudeness of the crowds in not allowing the friends to bring the man through to Jesus. Pharisees were never known for their charity to others.

The Miracle

We can imagine the startled response of the crowd as the roof was torn away. See the poor fellow being lowered by ropes at the Lord's feet. The air would have been charged with excitement. The man and his friends were hoping that Christ would honor their efforts and grant a blessing. He might have resented their interruption of His teaching. The crowd surged forward, wondering if they would see some spectacular miracle.

The blessing received was unexpected. Jesus said, "Son, thy sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). But that was not what his friends had gone to all their trouble for. They were seeking physical healing of his diseased body. But Christ could see into the depths of the man's soul and discern the actual root of his problem. Having cured the cause, He could then relieve the symptoms.

The Critics Refuted

The Pharisees were not impressed with Jesus' action. They reasoned among themselves, likely whispering to one another, according to Luke's account (Luke 5:21,22). They correctly reasoned, "Only God can forgive sins." For a mere man to make such a claim was indeed blasphemous. But herein was their fallacy: they thought of Jesus only as a man. They did not recognize or acknowledge Him as God in the flesh (John 1:1-3, 14).

Jesus forced them into the open with their doubts and criticisms. In so doing, He overwhelmed and routed them. The very fact that He knew their thoughts and whispered criticisms demonstrated His omniscience.

The Pharisees mistakenly connected all suffering with personal sin. Rabbi Ammi said, "There is no death without guilt, no suffering without sin." Rabbi Alexandrai said, "No man gets up from his sickness till God has forgiven all his sins." Thus Jesus was doing precisely what they normally would agree had to be done prior to healing of the body. Yet, they were rejecting Jesus' so doing.

To drive His enemies to their knees, Jesus delivered an unanswerable argument. They no doubt reasoned, "anyone can say 'Your sins are forgiven', since there is no way to prove or disprove it." Christ accepted their challenge and took a position that would make or break His claim. He said, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins..." We thrill at His boldness. This was His first recorded public claim to forgive sins. In so doing He used the Messianic title "Son of man" from Daniel 7:13. Then He said to the sick man, "Arise, take up thy bed and go unto thy house." If He could cure the disease, by their own doctrine He could then forgive the sin which they said caused it!

They said that only God can forgive sins, but Jesus could forgive sins. He demonstrated that by using their own logic. Therefore Jesus was God! We must never forget this great truth: "The Word was God" (John 1:1-3,14). Thomas confessed Him as "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

The Response

The palsied man was immediately healed. He arose, took up his mat and left. His four friends were overjoyed. The crowd was amazed and glorified God (Luke 5:26). The carping Pharisees were speechless. We can visualize them as they shoved their way through the buzzing crowd

with teeth clenched and chin juttred out, seething with anger and humiliated pride.

Lessons to Remember

Even today, those who seek the Lord and His true gospel often find the way cluttered and blocked with human doctrines and traditions and sometimes personalities that keep them from Him.

Each of us has our sin-sick friends and loved ones who desperately need to be brought to the Savior.

There are some folks whose case is such that a band of helpers is needed to get them to their Lord. Preachers, personal workers, Bible class teachers and prayerful petitions are all needed to save them.

There are some cases that require thought and planning ahead if we are to save them. We cannot be too concerned about proprieties and conventions lest we lose our chance. We must become all things to all men in order to win them (1 Corinthians 9:22). We need "holy ingenuity" to get them to the Savior.

No matter how great the crowd, Jesus had time for the individual, and so must we.

Sin is the original cause of all human suffering (Romans 5:12). The root of most of life's problems is unforgiven sin. Therefore, good spiritual health is valuable for good physical health.

We rejoice in Christ's compassion and His willingness to forgive our sins. The glory of the gospel is expressed in 1 Peter 5:7, "he careth for you." His pardon is available at any moment we choose to accept it (Matthew 11:28). Obedient faith is the fundamental prerequisite if we would enjoy His blessings (Hebrews 11:6a; Galatians 5:6). No man or team of men can do in a lifetime what Christ can do in a moment.

We still have our scribes who find it hard to speak a noble word about a fellow preacher.

The multitudes saw Jesus' deeds and believed; the intellectuals did not. Jesus yet stands ready to grant us forgiveness if we with trusting faith come on His terms.

Questions

1. Describe the typical Palestinian home of Jesus' day.
2. What do we know of the man Jesus healed?
3. Discuss the actions of the poor man's friends that day.
4. Why were the Pharisees and doctors of the law present that day?
5. How would the act of opening the roof to let the patient down likely have been viewed by the householder?
6. What was unique about Jesus' response to the man?
7. How did his critics express themselves?
8. What was the fundamental mistake of the Pharisees, regarding suffering?
9. How did Jesus completely rout His enemies?
10. That Jesus could heal the man proved two other greater points. What were they?

17

A SELF-PORTRAIT OF PAUL

Without dispute, the greatest disciple of Jesus was Paul the apostle. The story of his life and work is too exhaustive for one lesson. We will limit our study of Paul to that reflected in his letter to the Philippians.

The Proud Jew

Before his conversion, Saul of Tarsus was a proud Hebrew. His Jewish pedigree was impeccable (Philippians 3:5). Born of the tribe of Benjamin, circumcized on the eighth day according to the Law of Moses, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews — that is pure blooded and totally loyal to the faith of his fathers. Paul was a dedicated Pharisee, the sect of Judaism that boasted of being the strictest of the strict and holiest of the holy. His zeal for God knew no bounds (3:6). He persecuted the church, mistakenly viewing the Christians as enemies of his God. He “shut up many of the saints in prison...and when they were put to death (he) gave (his) vote against them.” He “strove to make them blaspheme, being exceedingly mad against them” (Acts 26:10,11). As to the righteousness of the Mosaic system, he was “found blameless.” To Pharisaic eyes he was blameless, but not to God’s. Later when he saw himself as God did, he wrote, “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

The day that Jesus confronted Saul on the road to Damascus, he saw all his dreams, ambitions and attainments collapse like a house of cards. “At midday...(he) saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun.” Falling to the ground, he “heard a voice saying...Saul, why persecutest thou me?” With great trembling he asked, “who art thou Lord?” And the Lord said, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 26:13-15). Compared to God’s Son, all his at-

tainments in Judaism were as worthless as garbage! The proud heart of Phariseeism's greatest zealot melted like wax before his maker.

Characteristics of Paul the Christian Apostle

When Ananias of Damascus immersed him into Christ, Saul the Jew died, and a new creature arose from the baptismal waters, Paul the disciple of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). His sins were washed away (Acts 22:16). He was added to the very church he had so bitterly opposed (Acts 2:47).

Paul the Christian was a *determined idealist* (Philippians 3:12-14). He claimed no perfection, but he had a clear and certain goal for which he strove. "One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He wanted every disciple to join him in that dedicated pursuit (3:15,16).

As a servant of Christ, Paul *served joyfully*. He was proud to address his correspondence, "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ" (Philippians 1:1). His *happiness* with his role was reflected in his joyful supplications (1:3). He *rejoiced* when Christ was preached even by his enemies (1:18). He exhorted all the saints to "Rejoice in the Lord always..." (4:4). Paul has shown us the religion of the joyful heart.

This apostle was an *humble cross-bearer*. Facing the possibility of death he wrote, "If I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice..." (2:17). He urged the Philippians to do "nothing through faction or through vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, each counting others better than himself" (2:3). Paul practiced that which he preached. He felt himself the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). He considered himself the least of all the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9).

Paul was a *thoughtful* administrator. As an apostle, he felt keenly his duty to guide the churches to maturity and to help them avoid the many pitfalls and problems confronting them. "Anxiety for all the churches" pressed upon him daily (2 Corinthians 11:28). He planned to send Timothy to assist the Philippians (Philippians 2:19-23). He reminded them, "For I have no man like-minded who will care truly for your state" (2:20). In addition, he would send Epaphroditus back to them. He counted that a necessary obligation both to the church and Epaphroditus. Paul was anxious that he be properly received with honor for a job well done in Rome (2:25-29).

As an *arbitrator*, Paul was *tactful*. His old friends Euodia and Syntyche were at odds, so he enlisted the help of Clement to mediate their

differences (4:2,3). In a document to be used before the entire congregation he praised the two sisters for their faithful service, and then urged their reconciliation. The entire epistle is sprinkled with exhortations calling for unity. He addressed “all the saints in Christ...at Philippi” (1:1). He prayed for *all* of them (1:4). He urged them to “stand fast in *one spirit*, with *one soul*, striving for the faith of the gospel” (1:27). Citing Christ as an example, he pled that they be of “*one accord*, of *one mind*; doing nothing through faction or through vainglory...” (2:2-5).

The apostle was a *grateful recipient*. He was ever thankful for their financial support of his work and let them know it. He wrote, “I thank my God...for your fellowship in the furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now” (1:3-5). He rejoiced at their response to his need and did not complain at their delay (4:10,11). He never forgot the kindness done for him years earlier when he went to Thessalonica (4:16).

Paul was an *optimistic prisoner*. At this time he was under house arrest in Rome for his missionary work with the Gentiles (Acts 28:30,31). The Romans kept such prisoners constantly chained to a guard (1:13). Altogether he had now spent four years in confinement. He had every right to be bitter or discouraged. Yet he saw his situation as an opportunity to evangelize the capitol of the world (1:12). He had thus had the occasion to influence the elite praetorian guard of the emperor (1:12-14). There were now saints in Caesar’s household as a result of his imprisonment (4:22). He was convinced it would all work out to his benefit (1:19). In spite of all his lengthy, dreary detention, he was fully expecting to be released and get to visit his Philippian friends shortly (2:24). But if he did lose his life to the executioner, he would find far greater rewards in the Lord (1:20b-23).

The manacles of Roman law could not stop the missionary outreach of Christ’s great ambassador. The gospel was preached. Inroads were made. New workers were recruited. Letters of eternal value were written. Church problems were resolved. The cause of Jesus triumphed. Rome decayed and crumbled. Christianity prevailed. There is no way we can accurately estimate the vast contribution made to the victory by the life, ministry and death of Paul. May we profit by this study and ever follow his noble example (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Questions

1. Describe Paul's pedigree.
2. What do you know about the Pharisees?
3. Relate the events of Paul's conversion.
4. Name four characteristics of Paul the Apostle.
5. What was Paul's attitude toward his past mistakes?
6. From Paul we can learn how to receive a gift. How?
7. Can you understand and explain Paul's optimism in the face of his hardships?
8. What good could possibly come out of his imprisonment?
9. What one lesson from Paul's life most impresses you?
10. Is it possible for us to be like Paul in our modern world?

18

PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

Little known people are soon forgotten, but a few are remembered because of some unique or unusual event in their lives. This is the case of Peter's wife's mother, who was healed by the Lord (Matthew 8:14-16).

Peter's Home

Peter and his family made their residence in Capernaum on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 4:31, 38). Being a fisherman's house, it would most assuredly have been an humble dwelling. His was a godly home. Peter felt comfortable in having the Lord visit him which would not have been the case if sin had been their lifestyle. Theirs was a hospitable home, and ours should be, as well (1 Timothy 3:2). We need to be reminded as to why God has so graciously given us our homes and property. They are to be used for His honor and glory in serving His people.

Peter's Family

Roman Catholicism has exalted the practice of celibacy, i.e., an unmarried priesthood, yet they claim Peter as their first pope. But Scripture makes it clear that Peter was a married man while serving as Christ's apostle. Paul notes that Peter's wife sometimes accompanied him on his missionary travels (1 Corinthians 9:5). Of course, she was a believer, i.e., a Christian. Peter identifies himself as an elder of God's church (1 Peter 5:1), and they must be married men who have their children in subjection (1 Timothy 3:2-4). The Holy Spirit who inspired

the Scriptures seems to have delighted in demolishing false doctrines even before their genesis.

Peter's Mother-in-law

This woman found a welcomed haven in the house of her son-in-law. It is tragic that there is hostility between in-laws in so many families. This should never be the case among Christians. Those were the days of the extended family. Paul admonished "If any woman that believeth hath widows, let them relieve her, and let not the church be burdened" (1 Timothy 5:16). The modern nuclear family has much to learn from the past. What our parents did for us as children, we should be willing to do for them in their declining years.

The lady was seriously ill that day. Luke the physician, describes her condition with a doctor's insight. He reports that she "was holden with a great fever" (Luke 4:38). Holden means "in the grip of," a medical term for someone *laid up* with a sickness. She had a "great fever." The ancient physicians distinguished between a slight and a high fever. She was so ill that they "besought" the Lord to help her (Luke 4:38). This suggests that her family was greatly concerned about her condition. We know that Capernaum was surrounded by marshes and continually plagued with malaria. This may well have been her problem.

The Great Physician

Christ had already demonstrated His power to heal "all manner of disease and all manner of sickness" (Matthew 4:23). The family was confident He could help their loved one as well. He came and stood over her, according to Luke (4:38). Mark says He took her hand (1:30). With a word He rebuked the fever, and it left her immediately (Luke 4:38). Our Lord needed no crowd to work a miracle, nor did He work in secret. There is no evidence that He asked for or demanded faith on her part as do modern "faith healers". He sought no contribution or "love offering" for what He did. His genuine miracles provided instant healing, not gradual recovery as today's self-proclaimed healers do. The difference in the Biblical miracles of healing and our 20th century healers is that of light and darkness, genuine and counterfeit.

Lessons to Remember

May our homes be such that Christ would always be a welcomed guest.

Let our homes be havens of hospitality for such is a hallmark of a Christian's home (Romans 12:13).

We must strive to love the family of our mate and make them welcomed in our home (Romans 12:18).

May you who are mothers of daughters succeed as did this woman in raising fine daughters to serve by the side of some godly servant of the Lord.

When healed, this lady immediately set about ministering to the Lord and to others present. She understood that she was saved to serve. She obviously did not enjoy being upon the bed and being served as some folks do. Serving others is the meaning of Christian discipleship.

Those who would serve Christ as elders and preachers have every right to take a lawful mate in marriage. Marriage is honorable before God (Hebrews 13:4).

Christ is able and anxious to bless us in soul and body, both in spiritual and temporal things.

Like Peter's family, we must learn to take our needs to the Lord. "Take it to the Lord in prayer" is not only a beautiful hymn, it is sound advice for every saint!

Questions

1. What do we know of the early life of Peter's mother-in-law?
2. What kind of home would Peter likely have occupied?
3. The fact that Peter was married is an important lesson in view of what doctrine?
4. Her presence in Peter's family has some valuable meaning for us today. Discuss that.
5. What was her problem this day?
6. What dimension does Dr. Luke add to her story?
7. In what ways did Jesus' miracle of healing differ from that of modern day faith healers?
8. Her actions following her healing teach us an important lesson. What?
9. What lesson does this suggest for your home life?

19

PILATE'S WIFE

As Jesus stood in the presence of Pontius Pilate, on trial for His life, the proud Roman governor received an urgent message from his distraught wife saying, "Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him" (Matthew 27:19). Matthew devotes only 38 words of his record to this episode about Pilate's wife, yet the story has intrigued Bible students through the ages. It is the glory of Divine inspiration that so much can be compacted into so few words.

About the Woman

All we know of Pilate's wife in Scripture is found in those lines. Ancient Christians tell us her name was Claudia Procula. Tradition says she was a granddaughter of the Roman Emperor Augustus. If this be correct, it may be that Pilate held his high office because of her family connections. As a member of the upper class of Roman society, she would have been well-educated, cultured and refined. As wife of a procurator (i.e., governor), she would have enjoyed a life of leisure, affluence and luxury. Being a Roman in Judea, she would have lived separate and alone in Jewish society. Any social fellowship would have been with others of the conquering Romans. A Gentile pagan, she was in the words of Paul, "without God and without hope" (Ephesians 2:12). Claudia Procula was fortunate to be with her husband at all. Emperor Augustus had earlier issued a ruling forbidding provincial governors to take their wives with them. It seems that too often they were found influencing their husband's official decisions. The governor's permanent Palestinian residence was at Caesarea on the coast. While visiting in Jerusalem, he made his lodging at Herod the

Great's beautiful white palace, which was lavishly adorned with silver, gold and marble.

About the Husband

History affords us considerably more information about the husband, Pontius Pilate. To hold the office of procurator, a man had to be at least 27 years of age. A procuratorship was bestowed only after extensive training and experience in other governmental posts, including a military command. Pilate was placed in his Judean office in 26 A.D. and continued there for 10 stormy years. As a ruler, he was completely out of sympathy with his Jewish subjects. Time and again he needlessly antagonized them. Unlike his predecessors, Pilate refused to remove or cover the Roman eagles and images from his standards when entering Jerusalem. This the Hebrews took as an idolatrous insult to Jehovah and a blasphemous act.

To provide an adequate public water supply, he undertook to build an aquaduct to Jerusalem. To finance the project he arbitrarily took the needed funds from the temple treasury, which infuriated the Jews.

A contemporary of Pilate, Philo the Alexandrian Jew, wrote, "...He feared lest they might go on an embassy to the emperor, and might impeach him with respect to other particulars of his government — his corruption, his acts of insolence, his rapine, his habit of insulting people, his cruelty, his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never-ending gratuitous and most grievous inhumanity."

In 36 A.D., Pilate was recalled to Rome after repeated complaints from his subjects about his brutality. Legend has him committing suicide while in banishment.

About Her Dream

At times, God has spoken to earthlings through dreams. We read of Joseph's prophetic dreams (Genesis 30:5-11). Pharaoh's servants saw their future revealed in dreams (Genesis 38:5-13). Pharaoh dreamed of a coming famine (Genesis 41:1-36). Of that dream, Joseph said, "The dream of Pharaoh is one: what God is about to do he hath declared unto Pharaoh" (41:25). King Nebuchadnezzar foresaw the rise of four world empires and Messiah's Kingdom in his dream which Daniel later interpreted (Daniel 2:1-45). God may well have spoken to Lady Claudia that fateful night in Jerusalem. While in times past He spoke to men in different ways and means, today God speaks to us through His divine Son, Jesus (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Ancient pagans were especially superstitious about their dreams. Job's friend, Elihu, reflects the view most commonly held of dreams, "For God speaketh once, yea twice, though man regardeth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men. In slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction..." (Job 33:14-16). But a wiser ancient father perceived the root of most dreams: "For a dream cometh with a multitude of business..." (Ecclesiastes 5:3).

Her Noble Deed

Pilate's wife spoke up for Jesus when no one else would do so. Judas had betrayed Him. Peter had denied Him. The other disciples had fled. His own countrymen were demanding His death. Every voice of authority in Palestine was against Him, yet she dared to speak a word for God's Son.

She sought to save her husband from a serious mistake fraught with awesome consequences. She was pleading "Do nothing for which you will afterward be sorry."

It was a grave personal risk she took in sending that note to her husband. Under Roman law, such interference, even by a mate, was considered contempt of court and punished severely. But, she was compelled to act, not only for her husband's welfare, but for her own conscience's sake as well. "Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man..." she warned.

She had a correct view of Christ when others with much better opportunities thought Him to be their enemy. She saw Him as "that *righteous* man." How she came to know Christ we are not told. However, she had been in Palestine during the years of His ministry. Jerusalem was no doubt humming with reports of His marvelous deeds and message. The servants of her household would very likely have known of His remarkable career. Doubtless the Nazarene had been a frequent topic of her husband's daily briefings concerning his domain. Early tradition indicates that she was a God-fearer of the Jewish faith, but this we cannot substantiate. That she, a Gentile, took Christ's side and pled His case, rather than the chosen Hebrews, foreshadowed that coming day when Gentiles would be the predominant followers of Jesus.

Lessons to Remember

Like this lady, may we always be bold to speak up for our Lord when evil men malign His name, His church or His Word (Mark 8:38). Only those who do so will He acknowledge in judgment.

Let us be concerned for our mates and others to help them avoid bad decisions.

We must not confuse our dreams with the word of God. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully" (Jeremiah 23:28).

That which we risk or sacrifice for Christ He will repay a hundredfold (Matthew 10:29-31).

Like Claudia Procula, we too can rise above our background and environment to serve the Lord.

So long as Matthew's gospel is read, what this noble lady said and did that morning will be remembered as a memorial to her.

Questions

1. What was Pilate's wife's name?
2. As a Gentile pagan, Paul said she was without _____ and without _____?
3. Why was she fortunate to be with her husband at that time?
4. How would you describe her husband's administration?
5. Discuss God's communicating to people through dreams.
6. Does he do so today?
7. What was especially noble about this woman's deed that day?
8. What risk did her actions create?
9. How could she have known anything about Jesus' life and work?
10. Name two lessons from her story that impress you most.

20

A TALE OF TWO PROPHETS

A wise person will learn from the vices and virtues of others and avoid making the same mistakes. Scripture records incidents for our profit, and we do well to heed their lessons. 1 Kings 12:26-13:32 contains a fascinating story of two prophets from which we can glean numerous lessons.

Background of the Episode

Jereboam ruled as head of the recently established northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12:20). He was a wicked man who did evil more than all who were before him (1 Kings 14:9). He regarded neither Jehovah nor his law.

The events occurred in and about the ancient city of Bethel. Bethel had been a sacred place since the days of Jacob who saw the vision of the ladder into heaven there (Genesis 28:12,13). It was called the house of God and the gate of heaven (Genesis 28:17).

Jereboam had appointed Bethel and Dan as national shrines of worship, lest his people be drawn to the temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem and be tempted to revert to King Rehoboam of Judah (1 Kings 12:26-29). He placed a golden calf at each shrine as objects of worship. It does not seem that he sought to introduce a new god, he only would change the form and place of Jehovah worship to keep his people away from Jerusalem and loyal to him (1 Kings 12:26-29). Such adjustments were condemned however, because God had warned “thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath...thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them...” (Deuteronomy 5:8,9). Jeroboam sought to link his calf symbols to the God who had brought them forth out of Egypt.

He failed to point out that Jehovah had severely punished those Hebrews of the Exodus for their golden calf (Exodus 32:1-10). The king also set up a priesthood of men not of Levi's descent (12:31). Even he himself dared officiate at the altar (13:1). In this he also transgressed God's law (Numbers 3:6,10). As Moses was the great lawgiver and founder of Israel, Jereboam was the lawbreaker and destroyer. "Jereboam drove Israel from following Jehovah, and made them sin a great sin." (2 Kings 17:21).

The event of our study took place on the day of a great harvest festival designed by the king to compete with the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. He scheduled his in the eighth rather than in the seventh month (12:32,33). Jereboam led the pagan procession and mounted the altar to burn incense. In all of this we see his presumptuous arrogance.

The Confrontation

Suddenly out of the crowd stepped forth the man of God, fearlessly speaking words of condemnation and judgment against that evil ruler. He is unnamed and unknown, save for this one event. His title, "man of God", conferred by inspiration, is greater than any king could bestow upon him. He was a prophet, for he spoke for God (Exodus 7:1). He hailed from Judah where David's dynasty yet reigned, where Jehovah's temple and worship were yet honored, and God's word was still heard.

He spoke words of doom on Bethel's altar and its illegitimate priesthood (13:2). That altar would be rent as a confirmation of his prophecy. Jereboam stretched forth his hand ordering his immediate arrest. How dare anyone speak such impudence! But as the words left his lips, his arm withered and the altar collapsed, spilling its contents on the ground. The sinner was helpless before the offended Lord. Terrified, Jereboam pleaded with the prophet to pray for his healing...which he did (13:6).

In gratitude the humbled king entreated the young prophet, "Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward" (13:7). But the man of God steadfastly refused. God had said, "Eat no bread, drink no water in this place." Half the king's house would not tempt him to violate his commission. That royal temptation was resisted by remembering God's word. The same formula will work for us today (Matthew 4:4,7,10). So, he departed home according to his divine instructions.

The Other Prophet

Among the witnesses of the events at Bethel were the sons of another prophet, an older man who lived nearby. They rushed home to relate the remarkable happenings of the day. This prophet had been content to stay in the corrupt and rebellious kingdom when others fled south (2 Chronicles 11:13,14). He had adjusted to living in the midst of idolatry and moral corruption without protest. He was like the proverbial dumb watchdog that could not bark, therefore worthless (Isaiah 56:10). Once he had known the way of truth and walked in it. Now he just stayed at home. But notice that his sons had attended the heathen festival!

The Tragic Ending

Hearing their story, the old prophet hurriedly pursued the brave young man to invite him into his home to eat bread. No doubt he admired the young prophet who did what he should have done. But the young man was steadfast in his refusal for he said, "it was said to me by the word of Jehovah" (13:16,17). The old man was not easily discouraged. Being determined to win his way, he insisted, "an angel spake unto me...saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house..." (13:18). Without a blush, he spoke the lie. The man from Judah pondered that point. To eat with a prophet in Bethel did not seem as bad as to eat with an idolatrous king. No temptation is so dangerous as that which comes shrouded under a veil of holiness and claiming authority from God. He believed the lie, crossed the forbidden line and went with the deceiver. Those who tempt us to disobey God are Satan's agents, whether they know it or not. Perhaps Paul had this very example in mind in Galatians 1:8 when he warned, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema." Surely the false prophet is the most plausible and dangerous of all tempters. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

"As they sat at the table..." the awful judgment was announced. Through the very mouth of the deceiving prophet the word came. Because you have disobeyed God, "thy body shalt not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers" (13:20-22). What may seem a trivial act of disobedience can have devastating consequences. The sanctity of his office did not protect him from sin or punishment. He had forsaken the plain command of God for the word of a man. He had sinned and the wages thereof is death (Romans 6:23). Jesus said, the man who knows

his lord's will and does it not, will be beaten with many stripes (Luke 12:47,48).

With a fallen countenance and a heavy heart, he mounted his ass and began his fearful journey home. But judgment did not linger. "A lion met him by the way, and slew him" (13:23-25). How can a sinner hope to escape God's judgment when even the beasts are used by him? Someone has well said, "It was the old prophet's lying tongue rather than the lion's paw that killed him."

In his death, the hand of God was evident, for the lion which killed him did not devour him, nor did it harm the ass. Normally such would never happen. The fact that the ass stood calmly in the presence of his deadly enemy was also a sign of God's providence at work.

Lessons to Remember

This sad story offers us numerous lessons to remember. Perhaps the first in importance is "...let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). It is not a momentary, but a lifelong battle we wage. The tempter knows his best opportunities. He often assails us at the moment we are confident in duty done. Remember too that temptation is most dangerous when it assumes a religious disguise.

Another important lesson is expressed by Paul. "Let God be found true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). We must be dedicated to honoring and obeying the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Other voices must never be allowed to replace the word of God: not nature, conscience, reason, public opinion or even the church. "God . . . will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Disobedience is inexcusable, even when the divine reasons are not understood.

"With such a one no not to eat" (1 Corinthians 5:11). It is important with whom we eat and drink in fellowship. Evil companions corrupt good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). Like that young man, thousands have wished that they had never accepted that invitation to disobey God.

We see the fallacy of the prevailing notion that in religion, it does not matter what you believe if you are sincere. Those who believe not the truth will believe a lie and be judged (2 Thessalonians 2:11,12). When the blind lead the blind, they both will fall into the pit (Matthew 15:14). How many good people have believed the lie that one religion is as good as another; or that there is plenty of time to attend to one's salvation; or just trust the Lord and you will be saved?

May the sad lesson of this man of God ever live in our hearts and help us not to believe a lie.

Questions

1. What do we know about Bethel?
2. What was the nature and purpose of the calf worship?
3. What do we know about this young prophet?
4. Why did he refuse the king's hospitality?
5. What can we know about the older prophet?
6. Why did the young man decide to eat with the older prophet?
7. Discuss God's judgment on the young man. Was it just?
8. How did the prophet's death by the lion proclaim God's involvement?
9. What are two important things to remember about temptation?
10. Discuss the question "does it matter what you believe about religion, so long as you are sincere?"

21

RAHAB THE HARLOT

“By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace” (Hebrews 11:31).

The worldly mind is often astounded at the ways of God. Why, he asks, would God place a harlot in the registry of the great saints of His people? Especially is this question piercing when one considers all the great and good people whose names are not included in that list. In this study we will seek out all we can learn about Rahab.

Rahab's Life and Home

Rahab's name meant “insolence or fierceness.” Her family included her father, mother, brothers and sisters (Joshua 2:13). She grew up in the pagan culture and religion of the Amorites of Canaan. Rahab was a citizen of the ancient fortress city, Jericho. Double walls protected the inhabitants from invaders. Homes were constructed of sun-dried bricks, with some of them built upon the walls as was Rahab's. Jericho was situated some two miles west of the Jordan River near the upper reaches of the Dead Sea. A ford allowed her citizens to cross the river easily. It was called the “city of palms” because of the many trees in the vicinity.

Rahab was a harlot (Joshua 2:1). Following Josephus, many have tried to soften this by suggesting that she was only an innkeeper. But the Hebrew word *zonah* is clear in its meaning. She was a woman who sold her affections. Some folks seem embarrassed that God could make use of such a person. We should remember that in Rahab's culture, prostitution was not considered a great evil. In fact, most idol temples had their “sacred prostitutes” who engaged the worshippers in “ritual fornication.”

Background of the Event

After 40 long years of preparation in the wilderness, the Israelites were now at the borders of Canaan. Joshua sent two Hebrews to covertly spy out the fortifications of Jericho before the siege. Jericho's citizens had already heard of the momentous acts of God on behalf of Israel in Egypt and the wilderness (Joshua 2:11). They were alert for the attack. The entire population was agitated and terrorized at the prospects (Joshua 2:11).

Rahab's Act of Faith

"By faith Rahab...received the spies with peace" (Hebrews 11:31). The Hebrew spies found shelter in Rahab's house. Being somehow alerted about the strangers, the king ordered a search for them, suspecting that they were in Rahab's quarters. "And the woman took the two men, and hid them; and she said, 'yea, the men came unto me, but I knew not whence they were; and it came to pass about the time of the shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out; whither the men went I know not...'" (Joshua 2:4,5). She hid them under the stalks of flax upon her roof and then later assisted them in escaping over the wall to the nearby hills (Joshua 2:15,16).

Many scholars question the morality of Rahab's action, pointing to her deception for the spies and the consequences to her homeland. Being convinced that Jehovah had decreed to give Canaan over to Israel for destruction, Rahab had but two choices: she could side with Israel and Jehovah or with her idolatrous neighbors who were God's enemies. Dr. Waterland writes, Believing the spies were God's men on a divine mission, Rahab "would have been treacherous both to God and to them, if she had not done it..." Matthew Henry observes, "If she had either told the truth or kept silent, she would have betrayed the spies, and this would certainly have been a great sin..." He further argues, "We are sure this was a good work: it is canonized by the apostle (James 2:29), where she is said to be justified by works, and this is specified that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way..." Rahab's action is understood when we recall that there are higher laws that can take precedence over lower laws. In dealing with difficult questions such as this, so susceptible to abuse, we must be careful not to extend the principle further than God does.

As preparations were made for the spies' escape, Rahab asked for a consideration in return: "Swear unto me by Jehovah, since I have dealt

kindly with you, that ye also will deal kindly with my father's house...that ye will save alive...and deliver our lives from death" (Joshua 2:12,13). The men readily agreed and a sign was agreed upon. "Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business...Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou did let us down by..." (Joshua 2:14-18). They then instructed Rahab to gather all her family into her house, and they would be spared.

Faith's Reward

The Hebrews passed over Jordan amidst a great demonstration of divine power. Several weeks passed by as they encamped at Gilgal preparing for their first assault upon the land. Finally God's command came to Joshua to move against the city. What a strange battle strategy it was; the great army of Israel marching around the walled city. The priests in their robes, the mournful sound of the ram's horn trumpets, the silent march of the troops was a strange spectacle to behold — no doubt confusing the inhabitants of Jericho. Then, on the seventh day, following seven circuits about the fortress, the trumpets sounded, the people shouted with a mighty voice, and "the wall fell down flat" (Joshua 6:20). Never before nor since has victory been given in such a remarkable way.

God had charged His people to utterly destroy every living thing, both of man and beast. In the midst of that awful slaughter, only one family was spared, that of Rahab (Joshua 6:22-25). The facts that they were straitly charged to remain in Rahab's house and that her house was upon the wall, implies that that part of the wall remained standing.

Rahab and her family were given sanctuary *outside* the camp of Israel since they were Gentiles and she a harlot (Joshua 6:23; Deuteronomy 23:3,17,18). Later, she was taken in marriage by Salmon of the house of Judah. To them was born a son named Boaz. The descendents of Rahab included David and the royal house of Judah (Matthew 1:5). Jewish legend suggests that Salmon was one of the spies Rahab had hidden. Even Messiah sprang from her lineage. Her name was purged of dishonor and enrolled among the saints of Israel (Hebrews 11:31,32).

Lessons to Remember

Rahab's story teaches us the universality of God's mercy. He has always loved all men and made provision for the salvation of those that

believe (2 Peter 3:9). Rahab was the firstfruits of the Gentiles to be brought unto God through Israel. Millions more would follow.

In this harlot, God shows us that no sinner is beyond the reach of salvation (1 Timothy 1:15,16). If God could save and use Rahab, surely He can use us in His kingdom. We see that faith is the vehicle of divine deliverance (Hebrews 11:6). Her faith was obedient, working faith (James 2:25). She entrusted her life and all to the great Jehovah.

Rahab had to choose between her country and her new-found God. She put the claims of God before her king and country and so should we (Acts 5:29). So far as we know, she was the only person in all of Canaan who acknowledged Israel's God and was prepared to serve Him.

This woman risked her life to save God's men. To hide spies in time of war has always been a capital offense in every land. She was willing to run the present risk for the sake of future blessings. Compassion and concern were noble traits of her life. Not only was she concerned for the spies, but for her own family as well. We, too, need that genuine concern for our friends and loved ones who stand in jeopardy. This reminds us that few people are totally bad. There is some good in the worst.

Rahab had to rise above her traditional religion in order to be saved. It is shameful when one has to overcome his religion to please God and yet that is the case of many folks today.

Our subject was a gleam of light in the midst of heathen darkness, and we should be the same in our world today (Philippians 2:15,16).

There will be many surprises in heaven: those we would not expect to find there, and those not there we expected to find.

God rewarded Rahab's exceptional faith with conspicuous honor. Christ will likewise confess our names before His Father if we are His faithful servants (Matthew 10:32).

Let us never disparage any disciple because of his past failures. We must be interested in what he now is and what he can become as God's child. Jesus said that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before many religionists (Matthew 21:31).

Questions

1. What do we know about Rahab's hometown of Jericho?
2. Discuss Rahab's "occupation" in view of her culture.
3. What two choices did Rahab face when the soldiers came looking for the spies?
4. What were the conditions agreed upon to save her family in the invasion?
5. Describe the Hebrews' unusual assault on the city?
6. Why was Rahab housed "outside the camp of Israel"?
7. To whom was she later married?
8. Who was her illustrious descendant?
9. Why would God want so much attention given to this woman with her scarred past?
10. What lessons can we learn from Rahab?

22

THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM

It is sad that the shepherds of Bethlehem are known only as an adjunct to the traditional Christmas story. Rarely is their narrative studied for its own worth, although it contains many valuable lessons.

All we know of these men is recorded in Luke's gospel (2:8-20). They were unknown peasants whose place in history was made immortal by the events of that night. The year would have been 4 B.C., for Herod the Great died in April of that year.

A shepherd's life and work was hard and gruelling. Jacob related his exhausting experience tending Laban's flocks: "That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night...in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep fled from mine eyes" (Genesis 21:39,40). David told of delivering a lamb out of the mouth of a lion or a bear (1 Samuel 17:34-36). Shepherding was a 24 hour per day, 7 day a week profession. Equipment and provisions for their work were spartan. Garments were simple. A rough cloak of sheepskin was worn in bad weather. On their shoulder, they carried a bag or wallet with food and personal items. For protection, there was a sling and a rod; and for support, a staff. In foul weather they used a small tent. Each morning, they led their flocks to pasture, and at evening they returned to the fold.

Among the ancient Hebrews, shepherding was a vocation, venerable and honorable, hallowed by great ancestors like Jacob, Moses and David. Even the great Jehovah was likened unto a shepherd (Psalms 23:1). By Jesus' time, the Pharisees and scribes scorned shepherds as common and unclean. The Talmud tells us that they were not allowed in the courts as witnesses. It is interesting that the sheep intended for daily sacrifice at the temple were pastured near Bethlehem.

The Remarkable Event

“And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid” (Luke 2:9). So great was the message that no less a person was suitable to announce it. The careful student notes that angels attended every step of our Lord’s ministry: the annunciation, birth and temptation, the passion, resurrection and ascension. “The glory of the Lord” which shown about them was the shekinah, the symbol of God’s presence seen repeatedly in the Old Testament (Compare Ezekiel 10:18,19).

It was an humble audience the angels appeared unto: lowly shepherds. Not to kings or princes, not to wealthy merchants or moguls, not to priests or rabbis, but to common folks who truly loved Him they came. The birth of our Lord in such lowly circumstances hallowed the common life and allowed the masses of humanity access to the divine priesthood. Today, anyone can be a priest of God who is willing to enter the kingdom (Revelation 1:6).

It was a thrilling message they brought (Luke 2:10,11). “Be not afraid,” they said. Such spectacular glory would leave a soul awestruck and trembling. “...there is born to you...a Saviour” — what joy these words brought to a Hebrew heart! The promise of the ages was now unfolding before their very eyes! His very name, Jesus, meant Savior (Matthew 1:21). He was not just a political or economic Savior, He was “Christ the Lord,” their long-awaited Messiah now come in the flesh.

The Gospel They Brought

The angel’s message was *good news*, i. e., “gospel.” This was the first gospel message given to mankind. Then and now it brings great joy to all who receive it. Even to this moment, no joy is comparable to that of the gospel of Jesus. It is for *all* people, not just for the Jews. A new age had arrived, good news for all nations, they could be saved by Christ (Mark 16:15,16). The *theme* of their gospel was “a Savior is born.” If this central theme is neglected, our preaching is no longer *gospel*, no matter how eloquent. Their message was *confirmed by a sign*. They would find a baby “wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” God’s ways are strange to men. This was not at all what Jews were expecting of their Messiah. An angel, a king or a warrior, but never a helpless babe!

The Angel's Song (Luke 2:13,14)

The angels praised God, saying "Glory to God in the highest," i. e., *in heaven*. Truly His coming has caused millions to give God the glory for His love and salvation (John 3:16). "*On earth* peace among men in whom he is well pleased." What a welcome, joyful message was this in a world torn by strife and hatred. How beautiful, even today. Among the Hebrews there was a festive celebration when a child was born. God provided His own minstrels to celebrate the birth of His Son in that austere situation.

The Shepherd's Noble Example (Luke 2:15-20)

We see their *faith* in the divine message. We mark their *obedience* to the divine charge to seek out the child. We admire their *zeal* in sharing their good news with others (vs. 20). There is a contagion about the gospel. A heart truly touched by it can never hold it in. Each of us like Legion should "declare how great things God hath done for (us)" (Luke 8:39). We should not overlook the fact that these men were busy, tending their common duties when God's message came. One cannot be pleasing to the Father who is negligent of his daily responsibilities.

Some Lessons to Remember

The "glory of the Lord" did not appear at the temple where were the professional priests whose hearts had long grown cold...rather it came to the warm, receptive hearts of humble shepherds.

The Savior's humble birth served at least two purposes; it made known to the race the supreme love of Christ's condescension (2 Corinthians 8:9), and it concealed the greatest event of the ages from the wicked who would have sought to thwart the divine plan.

Francis of Assisi wrote, "For our sakes he was born a stranger in an open stable; he lived without a place of his own wherein to lay his head, subsisting by the charity of good people; and he died naked on a cross in the close embrace of holy poverty." It is a marvel that a cradle too poor for a child was fitting for God's Son. Where normally lay food for beasts now lay the bread of life to feed a hungry race of men (John 6:48-57). No man will complain about his poor clothes or shelter if he

remembers the swaddling clothes and manger of our Lord. How much we owe Him who sacrificed so much for us!

The Almighty Son of God as a helpless babe was a type of His coming kingdom, apparently helpless in the world of powerful kingdoms, yet more powerful and enduring than all (Matthew 13:31,32).

Christ's birth was a real historic event, not a myth or fable like those of pagan religions. Dates and places are given. Eyewitnesses verified the facts.

May each of us respond to the good news of Christ as did those shepherds. Let us seek out the Saviour, let us tell everyone all we have seen and heard of him and let us praise and glorify our God all the days of our lives.

Questions

1. Describe the shepherd's work.
2. How did the ancient Hebrews view this vocation?
3. What was "the glory of the Lord" that they saw that night?
4. What was the significance of the angels appearing to such a lowly group of men?
5. What was the good news the angels brought?
6. What does the Savior's humble birth teach us?
8. What will reflecting on the manger and swaddling clothes do for us?
9. How is Christ's birth history different from that of the pagan religions?
10. What lesson impressed you most in this episode?

23

SOLOMON, THE MAGNIFICENT

In the course of human history, few men have been the equal of Solomon, king of Israel. Few have risen so high, excelled in so many areas or fallen to such depths as this mighty king. It has well been said that “the shipwreck of Solomon was the most terrible tragedy in the world.”

His Early Life

Solomon was the second child of Bathsheba and David, king of Israel (2 Samuel 12:24). He was the 10th son born to David. He was born in Jerusalem about 1,000 B.C. His parents gave him the lovely name Solomon, which meant “peaceful.” The prophet Nathan bestowed a second name upon the babe, calling him Jedidiah which meant “beloved of the Lord” (2 Samuel 12:24,25). Growing up, the young prince enjoyed all the advantages of a king’s son. He was blessed to have as his father a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22).

A poetic description of Solomon in his prime is placed in the mouth of one of his brides in Song of Solomon 5:10-16:

“My beloved is white and ruddy, The chiefest among ten thousand.
His head is as the most fine gold; His locks are bushy, and black as a raven.
His eyes are like doves beside the water brooks, Washed with milk, and fitly set.
His cheeks are as a bed of spices, As banks of sweet herbs:
His lips are as lilies, dropping liquid myrrh.
His hands are as rings of gold set with beryl:
His body is as ivory work overlaid with sapphires.
His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold:
His aspect is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.
His mouth is most sweet; Yea, he is altogether lovely...”

Allowing for the intoxication of romance, we can still see a handsome man with ruddy cheeks and wavy black hair; physically strong with all the features of a born leader.

His Coronation As King

By God's decree Solomon was anointed king in the place of David his father (1 Chronicles 28:4,5). While David was yet alive, another son, Adonijah, the son of Haggith (another wife) sought to usurp the throne, but the aged king thwarted it. He had Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet to publicly anoint Solomon and bring him to sit upon the royal throne (1 Kings 5:53). "They blew the trumpet; and all the people said, Long live king Solomon...and rejoiced with great joy..." (1 Kings 1:39,40). The new king was some 20 years of age when he began to reign in about 970 B.C.

His Accomplishments

Solomon excelled in many areas, one of which was as a builder. His chief architectural accomplishment was the great Temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:37,38). Thirty-three hundred supervisors and 150,000 laborers took seven years in constructing the temple. "And the house...was built of stone made ready at the quarry; and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building" (1 Kings 6:7). The splendor and beauty of the temple made it one of the attractions of the ancient world.

In addition, "Solomon was building his own house thirteen years" (1 Kings 7:1). The record reveals that it was truly a king's palace. Along with these feats, he built numerous store cities and fortified cities (2 Chronicles 8:3-6). He built the Millo which is thought to have been a kind of city hall or civic center and even a heathen shrine for his pagan wives (1 Kings 11:7,8). Truly Solomon was one of the great builders of antiquity.

Economically, he developed Israel as a commercial power. He built a merchant fleet that brought him treasures from afar (2 Chronicles 8:17,18). Israel's national treasury burgeoned with six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold flowing in annually plus all the other sources of wealth (2 Chronicles 9:13,14).

Solomon's personal wealth was immense. He "made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold." "All king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold." "Silver was nothing accounted of in" his days.

“Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches...” (2 Chronicles 9:13-21).

The borders of Solomon’s kingdom stretched from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates and from Mt. Lebanon on the north to the border of Egypt (1 Kings 4:21). For forty years he ruled in pomp and power (1 Kings 4:21). Israel reached its pinnacle under his leadership. His was a peaceful reign; for 40 years Israel hardly saw a battle — a situation unique in their history.

The wisdom of Solomon was fabulous. “God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding, exceeding much...” His wisdom excelled that “of all the children of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.” He was an authority on plant and animal life. “And he spake of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of birds, and of creeping things, and of fishes.” He spake 3,000 proverbs of which we have some 800 preserved. Solomon gleaned the wisdom of other wise men (Ecclesiastes 12:9). Of his 1,005 songs, we have only three (1 Kings 4:29-34).

Three of the books of our Bible were authored by Solomon: *Proverbs*, a guide book of practical godliness; *Ecclesiastes*, a book of moral philosophy, describing the author’s search for meaning and happiness in life; *Song of Solomon* which celebrates the beauties of married love, and two Psalms — 72 and 127.

Solomon’s Religious Life

“Solomon loved Jehovah, walking in the statutes of David his father...” (1 Kings 3:3). He worshipped the Lord and sought to please Him (1 Kings 3:4-9). He built the beautiful temple for the public worship of God and wrote important chapters in the Sacred Book of God.

His Failures

“King Solomon loved many foreign women...and he had seven hundred wives...and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart” (1 Kings 11:1-3). Such marriages were usually designed to cement political alliances. But God had forbidden such alliances (Deuteronomy 7:2-5). He built a strong military machine which God also forbade (Deuteronomy 17:16). He dedicated himself to a life of materialism and indulgence which God specifically condemned (Ecclesiastes 2:1-10). The God whose law he broke judged him (Deuteronomy 17:14-17). His idolatrous wives turned his heart away

from the Lord. He built the shrine for their idols, and God was angry with him (1 Kings 11:4-9).

In Ecclesiastes we have recorded Solomon's fruitless search for happiness without God. He sought it in worldly wisdom, materialism, sensual pleasure, wealth, possessions and power. Each of them he found to be vanity and striving after the wind, i.e. seeking to capture the wind (Ecclesiastes 1:14). Only in fearing God and keeping His commandments did he find the prize he sought (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

His lavish programs were a burden to his subjects and brought the nation to the brink of disaster (1 Kings 12:4). It was the spark that caused civil strife and division in his son Rehoboam's day.

His End

Solomon died after a long and prosperous reign of 40 years. He was an old man worn out from excessive indulgence. He left behind an impoverished treasury, a bitter people, a tottering throne and an incompetent heir. From Ecclesiastes we can hope he found his way back to God ere he died (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14).

Lessons to Remember

Solomon has been called the most disappointing man in the Old Testament. Jesus said, "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48). From him we can learn where happiness is not to be found. It is not where most folks are yet looking: i.e., in worldly wisdom, wealth, pleasure or power. Only by fearing God and keeping His commandments can we find true happiness. Solomon grasped at the attractiveness of power and missed its substance. Many like him, in their pursuit of luxury and pleasure have betrayed the best interests of their families and caused great harm.

We see the importance of marrying a mate that shares our faith in God, lest we be turned away from the word (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

Solomon taught much better than he lived. May our family and friends be safe in following our example (Philippians 4:9). Even from his tragic mistakes we can learn much from Solomon that will help us in finding the happy life.

Questions

1. Name his parents.
2. What did his two names mean?
3. When and under what circumstances did he take the throne?
4. Name three of his great architectural accomplishments.
5. What was the extent of his wealth?
6. How extensive was Solomon's kingdom?
7. Name the sacred books he wrote.
8. How would you describe his religious life?
9. What was the root of his downfall?
10. What one thing about Solomon impresses you most?

24

THE SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN

As Jesus drew near the fateful climax of His ministry, He left the hostile environment of Jewry and took His band into Phoenicia. It was the only trip our Lord made beyond the borders of Palestine. He sought a period of quiet and rest before the final stage of His ministry. But even the pagan regions of Tyre and Sidon had heard of the fame of Jesus (Matthew 4:24). Both Matthew (15:21-28) and Mark (7:24-30) tell us of a woman who sought out the Lord and gained a blessing from him that day.

What We Know About This Woman

By name she is unknown, by race a Canaanite (Matthew 15:21). By religion she was a heathen, by social standards she was a nobody. Her disadvantages were many: racial, social, and spiritual. Being a Gentile, what claim could she hope to make on this Jewish rabbi? We see her respectful address: "O Lord, thou son of David" (Matthew 15:22). She manifested great faith in coming to Jesus for help. Her troubles drove her to the Lord; there was no one else to turn to. She reflected great humility, being willing to take rejection; to be classed as a "dog"; to beg in order to receive the needed blessing. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." (Matthew 5:3). We admire her selfless mother's love for her sick child. We admire her persistence in not accepting discouragement. The disciples sought to send her away. Three times the Lord failed to grant her wish. All of this helps us understand the basis on which the Lord answered her request; not by merit but by grace. She had nothing to offer in exchange but her eternal love and thankfulness.

Christ's Response to This Woman

"He answered her not a word" (Matthew 15:23). It was not that he did not know her need or care for her problems. He was testing her faith like God did Abraham's (Genesis 22:1). While he said no, his face said yes to the entreating woman.

"I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Christ's primary mission was to Israel's lost sheep. Most likely she had heard proud Jews say this in a taunting way. Could she believe He was to be savior of all?

He said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs" (Matthew 15:26). This was a common proverb among the Jews. Jews sarcastically called Gentiles dogs, but Jesus softened the word by using the word *kunaria*, i.e., pet dog or puppy, not the word for the wild, scavenger dogs of the streets.

"O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matthew 15:28). Her faith and persistence had triumphed gloriously. Someone has observed that "this is the only case recorded where anyone won an argument with Jesus." In every age, faith is the victor that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

Lessons to Learn

From this woman we learn that none need ever despair of approaching God because of depth of distress, disadvantage of position or because of preliminary lack of success. Trouble can be a blessing if it drives us to the Lord.

We see that faith can spring up in even the most unfavorable circumstances. Often the least likely is actually the most likely prospect if we but give them opportunity.

She demonstrates the need for faith. "They that are of faith are blest with the faithful Abraham" (Galatians 3:9). Also, we are reminded of the need for persistent prayer (Luke 18:1).

We must never be discouraged by the lack of understanding or sympathy of some of the Lord's disciples.

Like her, we can bring rich blessings to our children, family and friends by our fervent prayers on their behalf. In her we see the beauty of a mother's love for her children and weep for those who clamor for the right to kill their babes by abortion.

From Christ we learn that He had time for *one* person, even though others would have rejected her. We learn of His universal love for all

nations and His willingness to bless all (Acts 10:34,35). He wants us to bring our burdens to Him for aid and comfort (Matthew 11:28).

God's momentary silence to our prayer requests does not necessarily mean a final rejection. Nothing can rob us of God's blessings but our own unbelief.

In this episode, Christ laid the foundation and planted the seed that one day would blossom into the world-wide outreach of Christianity (Matthew 28:19). He had taught the disciples to pray "thy kingdom come." In this He showed them what that meant. In fact, this likely was the principle point of the story, i.e., to teach the disciples that Gentiles would have their place in His kingdom.

Like this poor woman, we all have problems we cannot solve alone. We are driven to Jesus crying, "Lord, have mercy upon me..." and He will, to those willing to do His will.

Questions

1. Where was her home in reference to Palestine?
2. What do we know about this woman?
3. Why was she driven to the Lord?
4. Discuss Christ's first response to her request.
5. Why do you think he declined to answer her request those three times?
6. What did he mean about casting the children's bread to the dogs?
7. What was it that won for her the victory that day?
8. What does her lesson teach us about prayer?
9. What is unique about this Gentile's great faith?
10. What lessons do you learn from her experience for your daily life?

25

THEY SERVED GOD IN THE DAYS OF THEIR YOUTH

There is a mistaken notion that Christianity is an adult's religion, that the Lord's work is reserved for those in their majority. Because of this misconception, many young Christians feel disenfranchised — that there is nothing for them to do—that they might as well wait until they are grown to get involved. Such is exactly what Satan would have them to do.

In contrast with the above, Solomon, the wise sage of Israel, advised, "Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth..." (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Today, there is a place for young people in God's kingdom; in fact such has always been the case. From the Scriptures we learn of numerous young people whose noble examples should be followed (Romans 15:4).

Miriam diligently cared for her infant brother Moses when his life was in jeopardy (Exodus 2:1-8). When the cruel Pharaoh ordered the death of Hebrew baby boys, she stood sentry by his little ark of safety. When Pharaoh's daughter found the child, *Miriam* arranged for his own mother to be his nursemaid. She had a loving attitude toward her brother; there was no jealousy or rivalry. She was a willing helper to her mother. Young *Miriam* saved Moses for God and Israel. But for her, Moses would have been raised a pagan Egyptian. All the good that Moses accomplished must be credited in part to his sister, *Miriam*.

David fought Goliath of Gath and saved God's people. At that time *David* was "but a youth, and ruddy, and withal of a fair countenance" (1 Samuel 17:42). Yet this youth had great faith in his God. He reasoned that "Jehovah that delivered him out of the paw of the lion and...bear...will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:29). The great danger of the occasion was met by *David's* great courage (1 Samuel 17:32). In all of his exploits, *David* gave God the

honor for victories won. He told Goliath before engaging him, "That all this assembly may know that Jehovah saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is Jehovah's, and he will give you into our hand" (1 Samuel 17:47).

Young *King Josiah* led his nation in a great spiritual reformation. He inherited the throne of Judah at age 8 (1 Kings 22:1,2). "While he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David..." (2 Chronicles 34:3). Josiah purged Jerusalem of idolatry, and led his people back to the Bible (2 Chronicles 34:14-33). He taught them how to worship God acceptably.

The boy *Daniel* refused to defile himself with Babylon's pagan practices (Daniel 1:8,9). He had been taken to Babylon as a hostage of war. Now he had the chance of bettering his situation if he could qualify for a palace job. Yet young Daniel steadfastly refused to violate the precepts of God's law to do so. He stood by his convictions and won. Not only did he get his job — soon he was given the top post in his field (Daniel 2:48).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were young men who refused to violate their religious principles. The arrogant king of Babylon demanded that they worship his idols (Daniel 3:5). They refused to do so on pain of death (Daniel 3:6). They believed that the God they served was able to deliver them from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:17). If God chose not to deliver them, then they were prepared to die rather than compromise their faith (3:18). And deliver them Jehovah did, in so spectacular a way that haughty Nebuchadnezzar was forced to honor their God (Daniel 3:28).

There is the example of the *boy who shared his sack lunch* with Jesus (John 6:9-13). He was willing to give of his resources to the Lord. As a consequence of his generosity, many hungry people were blessed that day. Because he shared his blessings that boy was privileged to witness one of Jesus' spectacular miracles; the only miracle recorded by all four gospel writers. His deed for Christ has been preserved for the ages.

Timothy learned the Holy Scriptures from his early childhood and served God in his youth (2 Timothy 3:15). As a young Christian worker, he received these words of wise counsel from Paul:

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an ensample to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity...give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Neglect not the gift that is in thee..." (1 Timothy 4:11-14).

This advice is good for all young folks who wish to enjoy the respect of their elders.

John Mark assisted *Barnabas* and *Saul* in their evangelistic work (Acts 12:25; 13:5). A young person cannot expect to be put into a leadership post until he has grown and matured by study and experience. There must be a time for proving one's ability and dependability. Mark was later rewarded for his years of apprenticeship by being selected to write the second gospel.

In closing his lectures to the young, Solomon advised, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee...and walk in the ways of thy heart...but know thou that...God will bring thee into judgment...Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The time for you to begin serving God is *now!*

Questions

1. Why do some young Christians feel disenfranchised about the church?
2. According to Solomon, when should one begin to serve God?
3. To what extent are we indebted to Miriam?
4. What lessons can young folks learn from her?
5. What made young David think he could win against Goliath?
6. From David we learn an important lesson to remember when we win a significant victory. What is it?
7. What was Josiah's great contribution to his nation?
8. What did Daniel risk in refusing to eat the king's foods?
9. What is the great lesson from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?
10. What must a young person remember when making life's choices?

26

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

Great lessons about life and death, faith and devotion can be learned from the study of the lives and deeds of others. This study is about the widow of Zarephath, who fed and lodged the prophet Elijah during a long and painful famine (1 Kings 17:8-24).

The Cast of Characters

There was Elijah, “the grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced” (Dean Stanley). Elijah is called “the Tishbite” since he hailed from Tishbe, a village east of the Jordan. He was a prophet of Jehovah. A prophet was primarily a spokesman for God (Exodus 4:16). As he delivered God’s message, he might or might not predict future events. Elijah has been styled the prophet of fire, since on two occasions God confirmed his words with lightning bolts from heaven (2 Kings 1:10).

Elijah was a strange and eccentric man. He lived the life of an ascetic — apart from society. He never married, and we often find him dwelling in the desolate wilderness country. The Bible calls him “a hairy man” which suggests a heavy beard (2 Kings 1:8). He wore the coarse prophet’s mantle that would be comparable to our burlap and was girded with a large leather girdle or belt.

His manner and method were unsettling to the wicked. His mysterious appearances from the back country; his bold, daring condemnations of idolatry, its promoters and practitioners struck fear in their hearts (1 Kings 19:10). When he appeared to the widow of Zarephath he was a fugitive, a wanted man. He was homeless, friendless and hungry.

The heroine of our story was a poor widow with a young son to care for. She was painfully poor. In those days, there were no pensions, no social security, no insurance. She was down to her last bite of food with no hope of another. Starvation was staring her in the face. The woman was a Gentile, living in a pagan land. Zarephath was a city of Phoenecia, near the Mediterranean Sea. It was situated between Tyre and Sidon.

The king of Sidon was Ethbaal, whose evil daughter Jezebel had married Ahab, ruler of Northern Israel (1 Kings 16:31). In the domain of her father was the last place Jezebel would think to search for God's prophet.

Despite her unfavorable background, this widow was a kind, benevolent and hospitable soul.

The Times

The date was approximately 905 B.C. Ahab and Jezebel ruled the kingdom of Israel in classic despotic corruption. She had converted her weak husband to the degenerate Baalism of her homeland. They were determined idolaters and dedicated enemies of Jehovah. His servants they persecuted to death. They were especially determined to lay hands on Elijah, their outspoken critic and judge. Never was the true religion of Jehovah at a lower ebb, or in greater jeopardy (2 Kings 19:10b).

As a judgment on those evil rulers, God sent an extended drought and famine upon their kingdom. It came as a direct response to Elijah's prayer (James 5:17). The drought brought terrible hardships upon all the people of the region, whether good or bad (Matthew 5:45).

The Episode at the Gate of Zaraphath

Elijah met the widow as she was gathering a few sticks of firewood to cook her last meal (1 Kings 17:8-12). We can imagine how she reacted at his ragged appearance. (How would a modern lady react if she were unexpectedly confronted by some shaggy, bearded stranger, dressed in an eccentric way?) It probably terrified her at first. He asked her to fetch him "a little water in a vessel that I may drink." That she graciously consented to do. But then he asked her to "Bring me...a morsel of bread..." He was asking for her last bite of bread, not only from her mouth, but her son's as well. She protested, I have "but a handful of meal in the jar, and a little oil in the cruse." "And Elijah said unto her, Fear not! go and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first...and afterward make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith

Jehovah... The jar of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail until that day that Jehovah sendeth rain upon the earth" (17:13,14). She believed the man of God. She shared her last bit of food with God's prophet and received a prophet's reward (Matthew 10:40). She gave unto God and He gave unto her (Luke 6:38). Rather than her generosity leaving her hungry, it resulted in her eating more than she would have otherwise.

Faith's Double Reward

"The son of the woman...fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him" (1 Kings 17:17-24). Her grief was unbearable. She agonized if perhaps it were her fault? Was he punished for her sins? The prophet did not chasten her for lack of faith or faulty ideas, rather he took her case directly to the Lord. For one who had done so much for him, he dared to ask what had never been seen nor done before. He asked God to bring the dead back to life. Three times he cried mightily unto Jehovah, "I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him...and he revived" (1 Kings 17:21,22). The rugged prophet delivered the son to his mother's waiting arms. We can visualize the overwhelming joy of the happy moments. Tears of happiness would have filled their eyes as the wide-eyed child embraced his weeping mother.

"And the woman said to Elijah, "now I know that thou art a man of God and that the word of Jehovah in thy mouth is truth" (1 Kings 17:24). Here is faith's confession. The evidence was overwhelming; she had to believe.

Lessons to Remember

Blessings are often wrapped in strange packages. There were blessings for her even in the death of her dear son. It brought her to a fuller faith. It made her conscious of her sin. Through the experience, she better understood death and resurrection. By this, she learned to follow God's ways. She learned the power of Israel's God to work all things for good for those that love Him (Romans 8:28).

God often uses the most unlikely people to help His saints. It is doubtful that Elijah would have expected to find refuge in the home of a Gentile in Jezebel's home territory. A song writer expressed the thought: "God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform."

Not all the women of Phoenecia were evil like Jezebel. We must not judge folks by their race or origin, but by their character.

Benevolence extended to poor saints is a good investment which pays rich dividends (Proverbs 17:17). God has a law of reciprocity, "Give and it shall be given unto you..." (Luke 6:38).

Faith is found in unlikely places. Few Hebrews would have expected to find such faith in heathen Phoenecia. We must never write off a community or person because of race, or economic status or religion. All men need the gospel of Christ and even among the most difficult and unresponsive groups, there are good and honest hearts waiting for the good news of Christ.

No home is exempt from suffering and death. Even saints must bear this burden (Hebrews 8:27). But he who makes God first in his life will be sure to find God with him at the last to walk the valley of the shadow of death with him (Psalms 23:4).

May we "forget not to show love to strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

Questions

- 1. Who are the main characters of this story?**
- 2. Describe the prophet of the narrative.**
- 3. What was the woman's condition?**
- 4. What do we know of her home?**
- 5. About what time did these events transpire?**
- 6. Give your reactions had you met Elijah as did she.**
- 7. Describe the miracle of the meal and oil.**
- 8. Discuss her likely emotions upon the death of her son.**
- 9. What could she have learned from these events?**
- 10. Discuss "faith is found in unlikely places."**

An Album of Bible Characters



About the Book

This is one of several books John Waddey has written on great personalities of the Bible. These character studies are filled with insights for Christians today. As a classroom study guide this "album" will bring to life great lessons from God's word. It is also excellent for personal study — a must for every preacher and church library.

About the Author

John Waddey has been the minister of the Karns Church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee, since 1968. He is currently director of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions. Waddey is a well-known author with 25 books to his credit. Some of his articles have appeared in *Firm Foundation*, *Gospel Advocate*, *Words of Truth*, and *Christian Bible Teacher*.

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