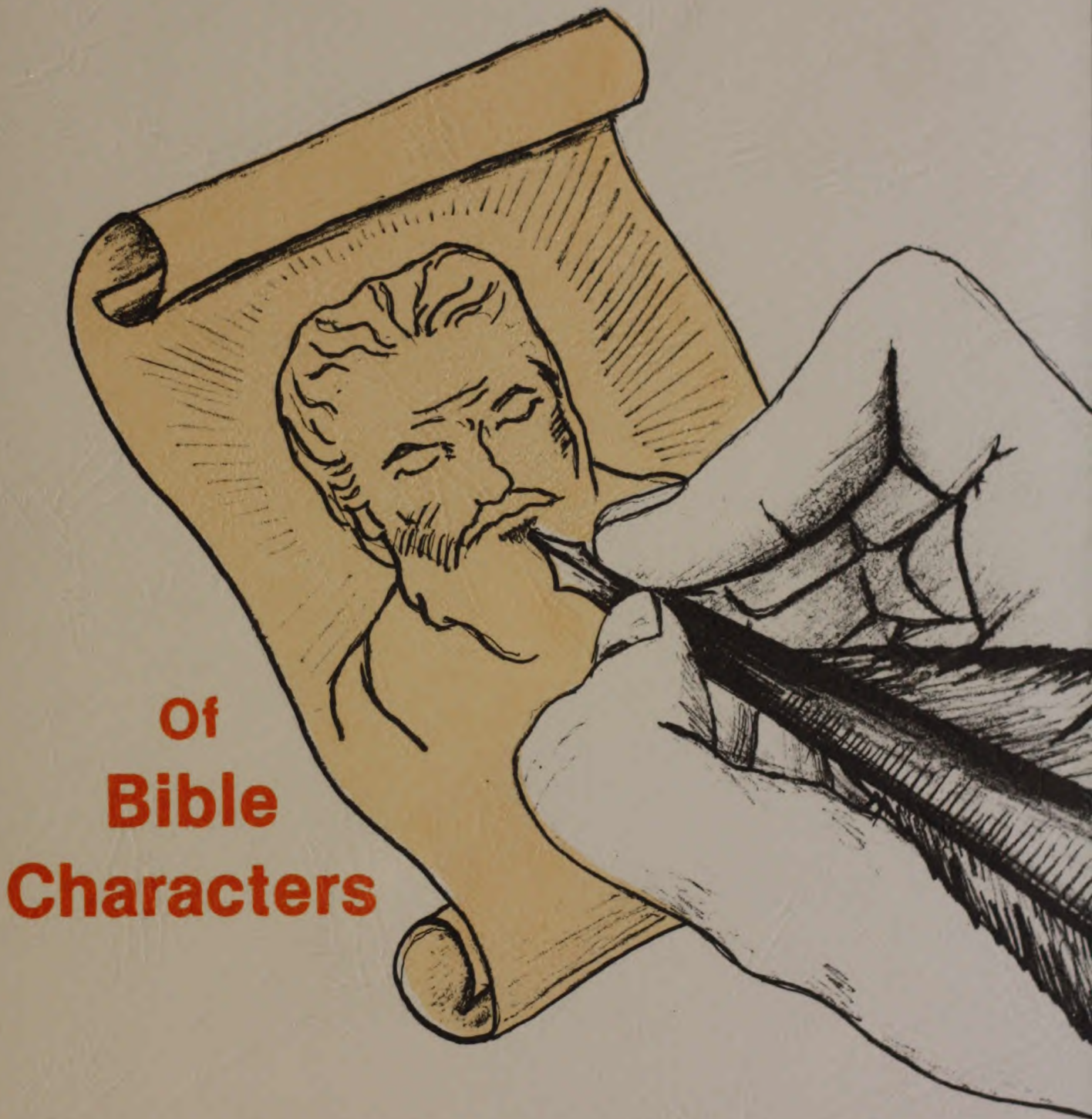


Pen Portraits



**Of
Bible
Characters**

JOHN WADDEY

Pen Portraits
of
Bible Characters

By

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Gospel Light Publishing Company
Delight, Arkansas 71940

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Cover Illustrations by Beth Hendrix

Introduction

Characters found in the Bible make profitable studies for us today because we can learn great lessons from their successes and failures. We can also learn how God dealt with them in each circumstance and thus relate it to his dealings with us. The writers of the New Testament used personal sketches extensively in their teaching as Hebrews chapter 11 clearly illustrates. Thus, this series of lessons by John Waddey should make for very profitable study.

John is certainly well-qualified to write such a book. He has one of the largest personal libraries in the brotherhood from which to gather information. He has a great respect for the wisdom and works of scholars from the past. John also possesses the wonderful ability to gather, organize and present interesting facts in a way that even those who are yet young in the faith can grasp their meaning. As a gospel preacher for almost 30 years and an instructor in Bible courses for 16 years in the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, he has had opportunity to become well-acquainted with people in the Bible about whom others know very little. He knows the culture and times in which they lived as well as what the Bible reveals about them personally. This helps him to make observations and applications that most of us would not see. It helps make these characters come alive. They become real people to us, not just names.

In addition to his specific knowledge and experience with Bible characters, John has proven ability as a writer. His articles appear in all of the better-known brotherhood publications. He also has published numerous other books covering various areas of Biblical study.

Based on John's experience, knowledge and ability, it is my privilege to recommend this book to you as a valuable source of information on Bible characters.

Richard G. Powlus

Dedication

To

Parker French

**who first encouraged me to be
a gospel preacher
with appreciation and gratitude.**

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Preface

Biography is the stuff of which history is made. Extract the records of men and women from the history books and you would have little left but the covers. This is also true of the Bible record.

A wise teacher constantly digs into his treasure chest to find new and stimulating ways to present timeless truth. This author has found biographical lessons to meet a number of needs:

1. They command the interest of his audience.
2. They are ideal vehicles for conveying great scriptural truths which need to be heard.
3. They help to broaden the hearers' general level of Bible knowledge by presenting a backdrop in which to place the personalities of the scriptures.
4. Stories of noble lives inspire people to emulate their examples.

These lessons were first presented to the saints for the Karns church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee, then placed in written form. For publication they have been arranged and designed to serve a three-fold purpose:

1. For those who enjoy reading the life stories of Bible personalities;
2. As sermon material for those who preach;
3. As a study book for Bible classes. There are twenty-six lessons, each with accompanying questions. That will provide a six-month course of study for a weekly class.

This book is sent forth with the hope and desire that it will help men and women to better know and understand their duty to God and thus be inspired to do it.

John Waddey

Biographical Preaching

Moses reminds us to “remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee, thine elders and they will tell thee” (Deut. 32:7). Biographical preaching looks to those of olden times for lessons for today. No more fascinating endeavor can be enjoyed than character studies of the personalities of the Bible. The lives of notable people of the past are exciting and challenging to every generation. Goethe wrote, “Man alone is interesting to men.” Christians have a rich heritage of great biographies to study, for the Bible overflows with life stories of both good and bad people. From the lives of those gone before we can learn many lessons, both of things to be done and others to avoid. Paul writes concerning ancient Israel, “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they lusted” (I Cor. 10:6). Since a congregation will never grow weary of biographical lessons from the Scripture, a wise teacher will make extended use of such in his lessons.

Everett Dirksen wrote, “Gallant men have faced dangerous and long, arduous journeys to widen the borders of man’s freedom. Each in his time contributed to our tradition something which has inspired not only his own generation but the generations that follow.” Great and good men and women inspire us by their noble examples to walk the paths of righteousness. Thus we imitate Paul as he imitated Christ (I Cor. 11:1). Any person will be influenced to greater things by a study of Gideon, Barnabas, or Elijah. All will be warned by the mistakes of Judas, Bathsheba, or Herod.

The author is constantly looking for fresh ways to present the old principles of the gospel lest his lessons become stale and repetitious to his hearers. Biographical preaching is a marvelous way to meet this need. Even youngsters love character studies.

Biographical preaching offers a unique and versatile approach to preaching in a local congregation. After one has

served a church for many years, how does he preach on those same essential themes that need to be taught repeatedly without becoming repetitious and boring? How does one keep his approach to salvation or baptism fresh after he has already preached ten sermons on these subjects? If one wishes to preach on baptism, why not present a lesson on the man from Ethiopia? (Acts 8:26-40). He was baptized. This is the major point of the lesson. If you would preach on the errors of modern "faith healing," preach on the lame man at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:1-26). Have you a problem brother in your congregation? Would a lesson on Diotrephes fit his need? (III John 9-11).

Our understanding of the Scriptures is greatly enlarged when we take time to learn of the social and economic, the religious and historical backgrounds of the key characters. Extended research and study of these men over many years are as close as possible to actually walking and talking with them in their ancient environment; and what a delight it is!

One problem to be faced is where to find a good source of biographical materials that are homiletically arranged. For several years this scribe has been collecting such books and lessons. Commonly three to six sources are studied before his own outline is sketched.

To be interesting, such lessons need to move swiftly. Getting bogged down on any one point is usually fatal. Lessons should be delivered in a 30-40 minute time frame.

Biographical lessons are really a variety of expository preaching. All agree that both the speaker and his audience grow most on the expository diet. Too, when we get thoroughly acquainted with the people of the Bible, we are better able to comprehend the messages God sent to them. In addition, we see ourselves reflected in their lives, their struggles, failures and victories (Jas. 1:25). Such study aids us in improving our lot.

Surely God's Book is an inexhaustible treasure-house of spiritual riches which will ever thrill the heart of eager students. Let us search them out and utilize them for our own benefit and those that hear us.

Noah

The Heir of Righteousness

“By faith Noah . . . moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Heb. 11:7). Surely no study of Bible personalities would be complete without consideration of Noah who was chosen of God to preserve life upon the earth. He was the first shipbuilder of human history.

His Times

Noah was the tenth generation from Adam according to Genesis 5. There was likely an immense population of men on the earth by that time. If each couple bore only ten children, there could have been two million souls in ten generations. Had they bore 20 children each, it might have numbered two billion. Remember their long lives of nine hundred or more years. Also, they would likely have enjoyed greater strength and health in those early days. Whitcomb and Morris have an excellent discussion of this question in the volume *The Genesis Flood*, pp. 25-27.

It was an age of moral and spiritual decadence. “The earth was corrupt before God and filled with violence” (Gen. 6:11). “Every imagination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). The children of God had intermarried with the sinners of the world and lost their identity (Gen. 6:2). Only Noah and his family maintained the faith of Jehovah in that wicked generation. And Jehovah said unto Noah, “. . . thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation” (Gen. 7:1).

God’s Decree

Because the earth was filled with violence, God said, “I will destroy them with the earth” (Gen. 6:13). “And I, behold I do

bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh . . . everything that is in the earth shall die" (Gen. 6:17).

To preserve Noah and his family and a remnant of animal life, God charged him: "make thee an ark of gopher wood" (Gen. 6:14). God always provides for the safety and salvation of His righteous remnant. The building plan for the ark was divinely given in minute detail. It was to be constructed of gopher wood and sealed with pitch; the length of the ark was to be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. "A light [window] shalt thou make to the ark . . . and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories thou shalt make it" (Gen. 6:14-16). God's instructions for salvation are always plainly given. The ancient cubit being approximately eighteen inches, the size of the ark was some 450 x 75 x 45 feet. Its carrying capacity would have been some 1,396,000 cubit feet, with the capacity of 522 railroad cattle cars. It could easily have accommodated pairs of all life unable to survive the flood, with adequate space for food.

About the Man

Noah was a man of great faith (Heb. 11:7). Since God says, "faith apart from works is barren" (James 2:20), Noah's faith must have been matched with obedient service. "Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations" (Gen. 6:9). He was not sinless, but he was a mature and complete spiritual man. "Noah walked with God." To walk with God suggests that his daily life was spent following God's leadership in word, thought, and deed. He was obedient to God's every wish. "Thus did Noah; according to *all* that God commanded him" (Gen. 6:21). He was not like many moderns who pick and choose the commands they would obey.

We are impressed by Noah's *toil* in undertaking such a huge building project with the limited tools, resources and help available to him. It was 120 years from the first instruction to the flood itself.

Consider the *trial* of Noah's faith. He believed that which seemed unbelievable to his fellow men. No flood of such magnitude had been seen before. It is thought by some that

there had likely been no floods at all prior to this catastrophe. Think of the *reproaches* he endured from his skeptical and unbelieving neighbors. If you question that such would have been a problem, then build you an ark like Noah's and see how the world will respond. A pleasure-mad world seldom takes the prophet of doom seriously. Think of his *perseverance*. For a hundred and twenty years he labored amidst the jeers and contempt of his neighbors, never giving up. He believed that what God said would happen.

Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (II Pet. 2:5). The spiritual giant he was, doubtless he was a great spokesman for God. But so hard were the hearts of his hearers that he was totally rejected. "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away . . ." (Matt. 24:38-39). He did, however, save his family. "Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his son's wives, went into the ark . . ." (Gen. 7:7). He did not fail. No man is a failure who can see all his family saved. Sadly, many spiritual leaders have not done as well in modern times.

Noah was not sinless! Following the flood "he drank wine and was drunken" (Gen. 9:20). Resulting from his intoxication was the awful sin of his son Ham and grandson Canaan. He heard uttered the painful words, "cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be . . ." (Gen. 9:25). Tragically, part of that which he had saved from the flood, he lost because of his indiscretion.

The Divine Judgment of the Flood

God brought "the flood upon the world of the ungodly" (II Pet. 2:5). "So he destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both men and cattle, creeping things and birds of the air . . . and the water prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days" (Gen. 7:23-24). It was appalling in form and universal in scope. It was both destructive and purifying in purpose. It was supernatural in origin and inevitable in coming. It was woefully sad and inescapable in its nature.

Lessons to Remember

God is grieved at man's self-destruction by sin. We see the Lord's tireless diligence to save man. God deals with men one by one, even as He did with Noah. We are touched by the caring concern God manifests towards His faithful children.

We are reminded of the indispensable necessity of obedience to man's salvation. Could Noah have been saved had he not built the ark as God instructed? With God's help the most monumental tasks can be accomplished.

The great judgment of the flood reminds us of the wrath of God against sin. We also see the vulnerability of the material creation before this divine wrath. That universal judgment foreshadows the destructive judgment of the last day.

Some sage once observed that the stench inside the ark would have been unbearable except for the situation without. If there are times when unpleasant situations arise within the Lord's church, remember what judgments await those outside the Lord's family.

May we have faith like Noah had, so we, too, may be heirs of righteousness.

Questions

1. What prompted Noah to undertake the gargantuan job of building the ark (Heb. 11:7)?
2. Discuss the possible size of the earth's population by Noah's day.
3. Describe the moral condition of society in that age.
4. Just how large was the ark Noah built?
5. In what sense was Noah "perfect" (Gen. 6:9)?
6. To what extent did Noah obey God's instructions?
7. How much time elapsed between the command to build and the flood?
8. Just how extensive was the flood?

9. Since so few heeded Noah's warning, would you judge him a failure?
10. Which lesson from Noah's experience impressed you most?

Shem, Ham and Japheth

Brothers in Adversity

In his chronicles of the pre-deluvian world, Moses writes, "Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations: Noah walked with God. And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:9-11). Few people of the Bible are as important to the human race as Noah's sons, since every living soul owes his origin to one or the other of them.

Their Names Are Prophetic

All we know of these patriarchs is recorded in the Genesis record. Shem's name means "renown or fame." It was from Shem that the most famous man descended, *i.e.*, the Messiah. Ham means "hot, dark or swarthy," and from his son Cush came the Negroid races of Africa. Japheth means "beauty or let him enlarge or he that prevaieth." Japheth's sons have proven dominant in the later history of the race.

Their Times

Noah's sons lived more than 4,000 years ago. From the genealogies of Genesis, we presume that the great flood occurred some 1656 years this side of Adam.

Their Society

". . . The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence . . . for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:11-12). So pervasive was sin that only eight people were found willing to serve Jehovah (I Pet. 3:20). The Sons of God had mingled themselves with the daughters of men. The inter-marriage of Seth's righteous descendants with those of evil Cain had disastrous effects upon the moral, spiritual fibre of society. The general social environment was so degenerate that justice demanded that God purge humanity

from the face of the earth and start over again with the righteous remnant of Noah and his family.

Their Home Life

Noah, their father, was “a righteous man” (Gen. 6:9). Compared to his peers, Noah was “perfect in his generation.” He “walked with God.” They were blest to have a father who was “a preacher of righteousness” (II Pet. 2:5). From him they learned to live by faith and to obey with godly fear (Heb. 11:7). Given the wickedness of their neighbors and the godliness of their home, we can reasonably conclude that they would have been viewed as a “peculiar people” (I Pet. 2:9, KJV). They would surely have felt themselves to be “pilgrims and strangers” in that perverse generation (I Pet. 2:11). Almost certainly, they would have been ridiculed and persecuted by their wicked neighbors, since “all that would live godly . . . shall suffer persecution” (II Tim. 3:12). Such a godly family would find consolation from God in being “persecuted for righteousness sake” for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10). Their parents had taught them the value of taking a mate that was a true worshipper of Jehovah. It has always been true that believers should not be “unequally yoked with unbelievers.” In the words of Paul, “for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness . . . or what agreement hath a temple of God with idols . . .” (II Cor. 6:14-16)?

Their Life-Saving Project

No doubt they aided their father in building an ark “to the saving of his house” (Heb. 11:7). While not specifically stated, we assume that they aided, for no other sympathetic helpers were to be found. It seems likely that their project took 120 years to complete, that being the period of probation God gave the sinful neighbors to repent (Gen. 6:3). The ship they helped construct was a gigantic thing 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It was large enough to provide a year-long sanctuary to a remnant of all birds, land animals and the human race (Gen. 6:14-16). Their craft had to be strong enough to endure that cataclysmic storm associated with a universal flood. When we think of their primitive tools and lifting equipment,

the necessity of procuring supplies from their natural state, and only eight of them to do the job, we are amazed at their accomplishment.

The Judgment They Survived

“In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, . . . all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights” (Gen. 7:11-12). All the high mountains were covered by the raging torrents and “all flesh died,” both of man and beasts (Gen. 7:17-22). Only eight souls survived the ordeal (I Pet. 3:20). They were the faithful remnant of their day, and God took care to preserve them (Rom. 9:27-29).

The New World They Inherited

When after a year they left their floating home, their father, Noah, led them in worship and thanksgiving for their deliverance. They heard God’s solemn promise to never again send a world-wide deluge (Gen. 8:13-22). They lifted their grateful eyes to heaven and beheld the glorious rainbow which was given as a perpetual reminder of God’s promise (Gen. 9:11-13). Wickedness had been purged from the earth. What a happy, wholesome relief it must have been to see God’s earth, pure and wholesome as He had intended it to be.

Their Legacy

Moses reminds us, “of these was the whole earth overspread” (Gen. 9:19). The sons of Japheth were the genesis of the Indo-European tribes (Gen. 10:2-5). Ham’s sons populated Africa and the Near Eastern lands (Gen. 10:6-19). Descendants of Shem were the beginning of the Eastern nations, especially the Hebrews (Gen. 10:21-25). While we are fascinated with the study of our genetic origins, of far more importance is the moral, spiritual legacy they left.

In Genesis 9:20-24, we read of a shameful incident that involved Noah, his son Ham, and grandson Canaan. Noah became drunk on wine. Inebriated, the old man lay naked in his tent. Ham, upon discovering his father in this humiliating condition, did some ungodly thing that brought a divinely-inspired

curse upon both Ham and Canaan. Just what transpired that day will remain a matter of speculation. Some have suggested that it was some vile, homosexual deed. Others suppose it was just a matter of ridicule. Whatever the case, upon regaining his sobriety, Noah spoke those awesome words, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." At the same time, the father spoke words of blessings upon his other sons. "Blessed be Jehovah the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant" (Gen. 9:25-27). This important episode is related by the divine law-giver, Moses, to explain why God took the homeland of the Canaanite tribes and gave it to the Hebrews, the sons of Shem. Strangely, most readers overlook the actual recipients of this judgment, the Canaanites, by mistakenly assuming it to be upon the Negroid races of Africa. But the Negroes are the descendants of Ham's son, Cush, not Canaan! There is no Biblical evidence that black skin was given as a curse. It is also noteworthy that there were dark-skinned tribes in all three great ethnic groups.

Lessons to Remember

Many great lessons are discernible in the study of Noah's sons. Each of us fortunate enough to have godly parents and a spiritual home should thank God daily for them.

No matter how evil and corrupt our society and environment, we can be faithful to God as were these boys.

We tremble as we contemplate the awful judgments awaiting the wicked. Then it was a judgment by water, one day it will be one of fire (II Pet. 3:5-7).

We are reminded that God will watch over, provide for, and preserve His righteous remnant (Rom. 9:27-29).

Last of all, the sins of a person can have doleful and long-lasting effects upon his children after him (Exo. 20:5-6).

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures, we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

Questions

1. Why are these three men of special importance to us?
2. Who was Shem's most notable descendant?
3. Which son fathered the African races?
4. Of which son are you descended?
5. How many of their contemporaries were decent, God-fearing people?
6. What do we know about their home life?
7. To what extent did the waters cover the mountains?
8. Besides destroying the wicked, what did the flood do for the righteous?
9. Who were the descendants of Ham and Canaan who suffered the judgments Noah pronounced?
10. What is the most useful lesson you have gained from this study?

Hur

The Helper of Moses

No leader can succeed without able assistants. Moses accomplished his mission with the help of good men like Aaron and Hur. So, today, no preacher can accomplish great things for God without faithful helpers.

Less than three months following their escape from Egyptian bondage, the young nation of Israel was threatened by the evil Amalekite tribe. Moses commissioned Joshua to lead Israel's troops in the conflict while he, Aaron, and Hur went to the mountain top to observe the battle and direct his forces. There before the warring hosts, Moses held up the staff of God as a banner for his warriors. When his arms wearied and the staff was lowered, Amalek prevailed. So long as the staff was upheld, Israel prevailed. Aaron and Hur held up Moses' weary arms until the victory was won. From Hur we learn many useful lessons.

About the Man

Hur was of the tribe of Judah (I Chron. 2:19-20). His father was named Caleb, his mother was Ephrath. Jewish tradition says Hur was the husband of Miriam, but this is unconfirmed. He had a son named Uri, and his grandson Bezalel was the craftsman who built the Lord's tabernacle (Exo. 31:1-7).

The Occasion

Israel was encamped at Rephidim. When no water was found, the people murmured against Moses and were almost ready to stone him (Exo. 17:1-4). God gave them water from the rock.

"Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim" (Exo. 17:8). It was a sneak attack from the rear. They preyed upon the weak and the stragglers, attacking when the Hebrews were weary and faint from their long march (Deut. 25:17, 18).

The Amalekites were descended from Esau, through his grandson Amalek (Gen. 36:9-12). They occupied the peninsula of Sinai, from the southern hills of Judah to the border of Egypt. So evil were they that God declared a perpetual state of war between them and Israel, and further ordered their extermination (Deut. 25:19). King Saul failed in God's commission to stamp them out (I Sam. 15:1-3). Later, David scattered their remnant (I Sam. 30:17-18).

Moses' Part in the Battle

Moses played a spiritual, not a physical, role in the conflict. While Joshua and his troops strove with flesh and blood in the valley, Moses wrestled with principalities and powers on the mountain (Eph. 6:11, 12). The angel of Jehovah related to Daniel how "the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood [him] one and twenty days; but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes came to help me . . ." (Dan. 10:13). Such spiritual conflicts are no less real because they are invisible.

Among the ancients, to lift up hands before God was to engage in fervent prayer (I Tim. 2:8). The intercessory prayers of Moses had a decisive influence upon the outcome of the battle that day.

Some might criticize Moses that he did not take a weapon and join his troops. But Moses at age 80 was not suited for combat. He was, however, suited well for prayer as was Joshua for the fray. As Paul puts it, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" divides to each as he will (I Cor. 12:4, 11). Had Joshua and Moses exchanged places, it is likely the battle would have been lost. As it was, each did his part and contributed to the victory. Too often leaders of God's people forget their primary duty as *spiritual* leaders. Thus, they leave the mountain top and enter the valley of mundane and physical tasks and, consequently, God's cause suffers. Preachers frequently get so enmeshed in the physical, material needs of the congregation that they neglect their spiritual duties. And a spiritually starved preacher will inevitably leave a spiritually starved congregation.

What Hur Did That Day

Hur was concerned for the *physical* well-being of Moses. When he saw his leader was weary, he provided a stone for him to rest upon. Such helpers are needed in the church today. Thoughtful concern can multiply the effectiveness of a gospel preacher. Considerate helpers make it possible for God's teacher to be free from concern about his own or the church's physical needs. We walk in the steps of Hur when we see that our preacher's housing, transportation, and office needs are supplied. Hur did not himself hold up the rod of God, but he made it possible for Moses to do so.

Hur strengthened Moses by his presence. Had he not been on the mountain at that time, he would not have known, much less have met, Moses' need. Even so, Christians are needed who will be there when the church assembles or when there is work to be done. Only those present know the needs and are able to grasp the opportunity to serve.

Moses was encouraged by Hur's understanding. Hur knew why they were on the mountain while the battle raged below. Israel desperately needed Moses' intercession before God. Hur understood the issues involved and how they should be met. Every elder and preacher needs that kind of informed and understanding followers.

Hur strengthened Moses' ministry by saving him from criticism. Had Israel failed in battle, they would have blamed Moses as they did on other occasions. By upholding Moses' hands, Hur helped to avoid both defeat and subsequent criticism. Instead, there was resounding praise for their leader. Any leader must be able to take criticism if he is to succeed. Yet one can be overwhelmed by too much of it. We need to help shield our leaders whenever possible.

Hur dedicated himself to enlarging the ministry of Moses. Moses was their leader! To lead well he needed the assistance of other good men. Hur met that need.

Lessons to Remember

The apostles, like Moses, saw the need to give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4).

As a result, the word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied (Acts 6:7). It is reasonable to assume a similar cause/effect relationship today.

Blessed is the spiritual leader with helpers like Hur. Paul was blessed with Timothy and many other such co-workers (Phil. 2:19, 20).

We can hold up the hands of God's ministers today by daily praying for them (I Thess. 5:25) and by assisting them in the physical side of their work.

Israel learned from Moses the power of intercessory prayer. Their victory was contingent upon Moses' intercession. His prayer was as essential to their triumph as was the bravery of Joshua's troops.

The Hebrew soldiers *trusted God and fought with valor* that day. Oliver Cromwell exhorted his English troops, "Trust in Providence and keep your powder dry."

They fought and won the battle, but they ascribed the victory, the honor, and glory to Jehovah. They erected a monument to Jehovah-nissi, which meant "Jehovah is my banner." Today, Christ is our banner in whose name we will fight and win (John 3:14).

* The author is indebted to Herschel Hobbs for the heart of this lesson.

Questions

1. Why were Moses, Aaron and Hur on the mountain?
2. What do we know about the Amalekites?
3. What was Moses' role in the great military conflict that day?
4. What was the significance of Moses lifting up his hands?
5. How would you respond to the person who says Moses should have been down on the battlefield with the troops?
6. What did Hur do for Moses' physical well-being?

7. In what way did he save Moses from criticism?
8. How could the average Christian serve God after the manner of Hur today?
9. Besides Moses' intercession, what was essential for Israel's victory that day?
10. What was the significance of their monument to Jehovah-nissi?

Bezalel

God's Master Craftsman

At Sinai, God commissioned Moses to build Him a sanctuary that He might dwell among His people (Exo. 25:8). As great a leader as Moses was, there were some jobs he could not do. He needed a skilled craftsman to build the tabernacle and its furniture. God raised up such a man in Bezalel. "See Jehovah hath called by name Bezalel the son of Uri . . . and he hath filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship . . . to know how to work all the work for the service of the sanctuary . . ." (Exo. 35:30-36:1).

About the Man

Bezalel's name meant "in the shadow of God." His family was of the tribe of Judah; his father was Uri the son of Hur (Exo. 31:2). He was born to slave parents in Egypt about 1500 B.C. He knew first hand the cruelty of forced labor. With his fellow Hebrews, Bezalel witnessed God's awesome plagues upon the Egyptians and experienced the great joy of the Exodus from the land of bondage. His eyes saw the Red Sea open, and he with the others marched through while Egypt's army perished.

The Skilled Worker

There is no evidence that Bezalel was a great scholar, teacher, or leader of men. But he was a skilled craftsman (Exo. 31:2-5). His qualifications for his work were four: *wisdom*, i.e., prudence and good judgment; *understanding*, i.e., perception, analytical skills; *knowledge* of facts and laws relating to his field of work; and *workmanship*, i.e., skill in doing a finished job (Exo. 35:30-35). His gifts and skills were God-given (Exo. 31:3). Since every good and perfect gift comes down from God (Jas. 1:17), all our natural skills are from God's hand. That

which God gives us, He expects to be used for His honor and glory. The Christian's natural talents are discovered by grace, directed by grace, heightened by grace, and sanctified by grace. We should always give God the glory for them.

His Call and Commission

God chose Bezalel for his task as surely as He did Moses. "Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, See I have called by name Bezalel . . ." (Exo. 31:2). We need to remind ourselves that not all of God's servants are preachers and public leaders. There must be the craftsmen who help get the job done. God recognized Bezalel among the 2-3 million Hebrews, noting his unique talents. The main difference between our subject and the other Hebrew artisans was not just the skill of his hands, but the Spirit in his heart. He was filled with "the Spirit of God" (Exo. 31:3).

In those early days when Bezalel was learning his skills in the slave shops of Egypt, little did he realize that one day he would be privileged to use them in so noble a task.

Bezalel was not free to make his own decisions when doing the Lord's work. God provided the blueprint for the tabernacle and its furnishings (Exo. 25:8, 9). Bezalel was expected to carefully observe and follow that pattern (Exo. 25:40). So today we who would build in Christ's temple, the church, must "make all things according to the pattern that was showed . . ." (Heb. 8:5).

Thus, God planned; Moses led; the people gave their wealth; but it was Bezalel who built the holy tabernacle. Apart from his skills, all the human contributions would have been futile. The money and material were there; they had a perfect pattern; they had the authorization. But, they needed a skilled workman to bring it all together and make it happen. Bezalel was the man of the hour.

His Enduring Monument

Bezalel built a sanctuary suitable for Jehovah that He might dwell among His people (Exo. 25:8). That tabernacle was the centerpiece of Hebrew worship for some 500 years. Every faithful Hebrew loved and cherished the tabernacle, its

furnishings, and ritual more than his own home. One of them sang, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of hosts! My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of Jehovah . . ." (Psa. 84:1, 2). Without Aaron the priest, there would have been no sacrifice, but without Bezalel, there would have been no altar. Each Hebrew who stood before the priest to confess his sins and offer his sacrifice owed a debt of gratitude to the noble craftsman who by his skilled labor had provided a place for the acts of devotion.

Lessons to Remember

Bezalel is a worthy example for God's servants who are gifted as skilled workmen, for without them the church would suffer. He plied his manual trade to the glory of God.

Moses was a great spiritual leader, but he needed a craftsman in order to get God's work done. The same is yet true today. Every elder and preacher has his limits and thus needs helpers like Bezalel. When a water pipe bursts, the church needs a plumber, not a preacher.

Genius is one of God's richest gifts (Jas. 1:17). Genius reaches its highest level when dedicated to God's service. It is a trust from God, and he who wastes or neglects it, or who devotes it to selfish or unholy causes, sins in so doing.

The same Holy Spirit that led Moses to write the law led Bezalel to build God's house of worship (Exo. 35:30, 31). Paul tells us: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit, and there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord" (I Cor. 12:4, 5).

The richest genius, like the most fertile field, when uncultivated, shoots up the rankest weeds. Thus, each of us needs to daily present our bodies and talents as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God (Rom. 12:1).

The church needs what each of us has to offer. God's tabernacle yet waits for the dedication of your skills and abilities to divine service. "So whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31) and "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccles. 9:10).

May the Lord raise up ten thousand men and women like Bezalel to help in building up His house today.

Questions

1. Where did Bezalel get his superior skills?
2. What were his qualifications for building the tabernacle?
3. Who prepared the blueprint for the tabernacle?
4. What was God's instruction to Moses regarding the blueprint?
5. Why was every Hebrew indebted to Bezalel?
6. Bezalel is a worthy example to which category of Christians?
7. Discuss how Moses would have fared without such helpers as Bezalel.
8. What special gifts or talents do you have that could be dedicated to God's work?
9. Discuss the idea of the church being like a body and the contributions of each member.
10. Do you know Christians with talents like Bezalel who have blessed the church? If so, share that with the class.

Caleb

The Mountain Claimer

The history of human progress is the record of courageous men and women who were willing to stand alone in the hour of trial and testing. Such a man was Caleb, the co-worker of Joshua.

When Israel had taken Canaan and the land was being distributed, Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizite said to Joshua, "Lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me. Now therefore give me this [mountain, KJV], whereof Jehovah spake in that day . . . it may be that Jehovah will be with me, and I shall drive them [the Anakim, *i.e.*, giants] out, as Jehovah spake" (Joshua 14:10-12).

About the Man

He was a Hebrew of the tribe of Judah. His father was Jephunneh the Kenizite (14:6). Caleb was a prince of his tribe. Moses selected him to be one of the twelve spies to search out Canaan for him (Num. 13:1, 2, 6). Only Caleb and Joshua were convinced that God would give them victory.

Of the men of war that left Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb survived the forty years of wilderness wandering. Eleazar, the priest also survived (Josh. 17:4). To enter the promised land was his reward for faithfulness (Num. 14:28-30). All through the long and difficult years, Caleb never forgot what he had seen in Canaan.

Although he was 85 years old, Caleb was privileged to lead his brethren in the conquest of the land. He was yet strong and capable, faithful and fearless. When the time to claim a portion of the land came, he challenged the stronghold of the worst of the enemy and took it for his own.

His Character

Moses tells us that “he had another [*i.e.*, different] spirit” than the majority of his peers (Num. 14:23). When Israel was at Kadesh, Caleb had great faith that God would give His people victory as promised. Others trembled with fear and unbelief. It was not the giants that kept them from invading Canaan at the first; it was lack of faith in God. Caleb was courageous and anxious to fight to gain the victory. Others did not want to run the risk. They wanted victory, but without a struggle. While others waivered, Caleb was faithful unto death, always dependable.

Caleb “wholly followed the Lord” (Josh. 14:9). He refused to run with the majority. He took a stand for what he believed in, even though it might be intensely unpopular. We need to be reminded that public opinion is sometimes public enemy number one! This great man remembered what God had previously done and staked his future on it. The crowd threatened to stone him, but he refused to compromise (Num. 14:10). With all his heart, soul, mind, and strength he followed the Lord. The godliness of his life made for the manliness in conduct. Caleb is a grand example for young men of today. His life was fully spent for Jehovah’s cause.

Caleb dared to undertake a difficult challenge. He not only fought to secure the land for the others, he claimed the most dangerous and difficult region as his personal battle. He would drive out the feared Anakim, the fierce giants of Hebron, that had so terrorized the others forty-five years earlier. He could have reasoned that he was too old, or that he had already done his share of fighting. By rights he could have demanded an easier inheritance or one already secured (compare Numbers 13:21-22 and Joshua 14:12-14). It is a mark of greatness to attempt the difficult. People cheat themselves by always choosing the easy roads. Students seek out the easy teachers; adults want easy jobs; Christians want an easy road to heaven. May God give us character like Caleb to dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe and win! Remember that it is the straitened and narrow way that leads to life (Matt. 7:13, 14).

Caleb's Rich Reward

At Kadesh his contemporaries wanted to stone Caleb. They perished in the wilderness, but he entered the land of promise. The children of his critics honored him as an illustrious hero of the nation.

Caleb had the blessing of a good conscience. He knew he had done the right thing. He was true to himself. That alone is worth more than silver and gold.

God honored this brave man, calling him "my servant Caleb" (Num. 14:24). His name was thus engraved in God's Hall of Fame.

Those forty long years in the wilderness, Caleb was waiting to receive a home in the promised land, while the others could expect only a lonely grave in a strange land.

Caleb experienced the joy of helping his brothers possess the good land they had long dreamed of. There is a satisfaction in having part in success and victory, in realizing dreams and goals long sought for.

The old patriarch claimed his mountain. He drove out the sons of Anak, took Hebron their royal city, and lived the rest of his days in rest and peace. "The land has rest from war" (Josh. 14:15).

Conclusion

The words of Philip Brooks appropriately sum up this lesson:

Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be strong men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for power equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle. Every day you will wonder at yourself, at the richness of life that has come to you by the grace of God.

With Caleb, claim your mountain. With God by your side you will surely attain it.

Questions

1. How old was Caleb when he claimed his mountain?
2. What was his physical status at the time?
3. Who were the Anakim he had to dislodge?
4. Of all the Hebrews who perished in the wilderness, why was Caleb spared?
5. What was the different spirit that Caleb possessed?
6. What was the degree of his submission to God?
7. What was Caleb's attitude in the face of difficult challenges?
8. Discuss the importance of a person being true to himself.
9. Think of some "mountains" you would like to claim in your life.
10. What is the significant lesson you learned from Caleb?

Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar

Job's Three Friends

The greater part of the book of Job is a record of the conversations between Job and his friends. It was a time of great mental, physical, and spiritual suffering for the patriarch. In swift and sudden blows Satan had robbed him of all his children, all his wealth, and his health. So bewildering was the turn of events that his own wife despaired and urged him to curse God and die (Job 2:9). Driven from his home, his friends, and his community, he was quarantined to the ashes of the refuse dump (2:8). Without funds for doctors, he took broken pottery and scraped the angry boils that covered his body.

Job had three friends of long standing: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. They were men of high rank, philosophers, and wise men like Job. Hearing of their friend's misfortunes, they came to comfort him and bemoan his sorrow (2:11). They came with the best intentions, but with faulty knowledge and zeal. Job desperately needed friends in his hour of sorrow, but he was forced to say of them: "miserable comforters are ye all" (16:2). Tragically, those who came to help fell into Satan's hands and were used to further harass the poor victim and multiply his misery. Like David's familiar friend, they lifted up their heel against him (Psa. 41:9). From them we can learn many valuable lessons for life.

Eliphaz

His name meant "refined gold," but that he was not to Job. He hailed from Teman. Temanites were descended from Esau (Gen. 36:9-11). Teman was a part of the land of Edom. Her citizens were renowned for their great wisdom down through the years (Jer. 49:7). Eliphaz was a true patriarchal chieftan—grave, dignified, and intellectual.

His method: Eliphaz was a man of eloquence and politeness. He began his conversation in a kindly way but grew angry and harsh when Job defended himself and did not accept his simplistic solutions. He poured alcohol rather than balm on

Job's wounds. He thought he knew all the answers, but in reality he knew none. He presented some obvious truths and disputed common knowledge that had little to do with Job's case. Being dogmatic and of strong prejudices, he sought to press Job into his own mold. His approach was cold and heartless, lacking that pity and compassion which Job desperately needed. Eliphaz spoke with that presumptuous assurance of a man who has never experienced the problem.

In chapter 4:12-16 we see Eliphaz's claim to authority:

Now a thing was secretly brought to me,
 And mine ear received a whisper thereof.
 In the thoughts from the visions of the night,
 When deep sleep falleth on men,
 Fear came upon me, and trembling,
 Which made all my bones to shake.
 Then a spirit passed before my face;
 The hair of my flesh stood up.
 It stood still, but I could not discern the appearance thereof;
 A form was before mine eyes:
 There was silence, and I heard a voice . . .

Eliphaz' logic: He claimed that a spirit had spoken to him in a spine-tingling night vision. Thus, he was relying on uncertain human experience. Eliphaz reminded Job, "With us are both the grayheaded and the very aged men" (15:10). He felt that his great age gave him the wisdom to perceive and the right to judge.

He reasoned, "Whosoever perished being innocent" (4:7). But obviously Job was perishing. Therefore, he could not be innocent but guilty of some great, albeit unknown, sin. Frustrated that Job did not concede his point, Eliphaz heaped wild accusations of moral evil upon his old friend (22:5-10). He felt insulted that Job had not bought his analysis (15:7, 8). In a word, his advice to Job was "to accept his chastisement as a gift from God that he deserved and needed" (5:17). In his mind it was for Job's own good that disaster had come (5:27). Eliphaz was magnificent but mistaken!

Bildad

He was a Shuhite of which we know nothing. He was descended from Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25:2). Bildad was

a scholar, wise in the wisdom of the fathers and learned in the lore of the past. His speech was full of proverbs and wise sayings.

His method: The record suggests that Bildad was loud, insistent, and even boisterous in his declarations. Little or no love was reflected in his words. They were blunt, and he gave no thought to the pain inflicted or the wounds he opened in his friend. Bildad was the kind of "man who has a text for all eventualities—prefabricated solutions for all problems and perplexities of life" (Blaiklock). He used truth as a bludgeon rather than as a balm. Insults were his chief tools to gain his point. He accused Job of being a windbag (8:1-6).

For his authority, Bildad relied upon human tradition. He appealed to the "former age" and that which the fathers had sought out (8:8, 9). Proverbs and maxims he loved to cite. His logic was: "God will not cast away a perfect man" (8:20). But evidently God had cast away Job. Therefore, Job was imperfect; *i.e.*, a sinful man. Bildad was the champion of orthodoxy, but he had the wrong "doxy."

Zophar

This man was a Naamathite. Perhaps he was from the city of Naamah in southwestern Judah (15:41). His name meant "twittering bird." The Septuagint calls him "King of the Mineans." He speaks as a man of the streets, a practical man who depended on his common sense.

His method: Zophar appealed to human experiences and wisdom (Job 20:2-5). He was blunt to the point of being violent and offensive with his words. He represents the prejudiced, narrow-minded bigotry of men who think they know it all. Zophar presumed to know all about God; what He would do in a given situation, and why. He dealt with profound issues in a light and frivolous way. Being self-righteous, Zophar could not tolerate questions or doubts in a troubled saint. To Zophar's kind, religion is a plain system of material rewards and punishment. Such folks experience no difficulties or perplexities because they are unable to grasp the issues which cause such emotions. "They are adamantly self-righteous, usually of sound constitution and good health; always comfort-

ably situated, not infrequently affluent. They are useless in the dark hours of the soul, a peril in the sick room, and a menace in the pulpit." (Blaiklock).

Zophar reasoned that "the triumphing of the wicked is short" (20:4-7). He falsely accused Job of oppressing and neglecting the poor (20:4-7).

The Conclusion of the Matter

After endless rounds of caustic speeches by these friends, God intervened. "Jehovah said to Eliphaz, . . . My wrath is kindled against thee and thy two friends; for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right . . ." (42:7). They had been wrong in their assumptions, sinful in their attitudes toward Job, and had falsely misrepresented God.

Lessons to Remember

These men were not cold-hearted hypocrites; they were good and sincere men whose chief defect was that suffering had not yet unlocked for them the door into Job's thoughts. They were well-intentioned, thoughtful men who spoke too soon, said too much, and spoke of things they did not understand. We wish that they had extended their seven days of silence (2:13). That would have been their greatest gift to Job.

Everyone needs friends of the right kind. We cannot have too many. Sadly, not all friends are of the helpful kind. A misguided presumptuous friend can be destructive and painful. An old English proverb says, "God save me from my friends; I can take care of my enemies." Zechariah's words fit Job's case: "I was wounded in the house of my friends" (13:6). A true friend will help a sufferer rather than oppress him. Friends need to know when to listen as well as when to speak. Solomon wrote, "A friend loveth at all times and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17). "Life is fortified by many friendships. To love and be loved is the greatest happiness of existence." (Sydney Smith). Euripedes wrote, "Life has no blessing like a prudent friend."

From Eliphaz remember that an experience preached as gospel will always do great harm. Dreams must not be confused with God's word (Jer. 23:28).

From Bildad we are reminded that what has been passed down from past generations is not necessarily true. Such a man as Bildad can be the church's worst friend in times of crises and conflict.

We must learn never to speak of matters we do not comprehend—no matter how great the temptation.

All these men had much truth; offered much good advice; were thoroughly sincere; yet were dead wrong in their conclusions.

Satan used these men in his attempt to destroy their own friend. Beware lest Satan use you as his agent to hurt a good soul.

In these friends we see the disastrous results of holding a faulty view.

We should thank God daily that Jesus is a friend who will never fail nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

Questions

1. What had happened to Job that prompted his friends to visit him?
2. What was the rank of these men?
3. The friends came with good intentions of helping Job. What did they actually do?
4. What were the Temanites renowned for?
5. How would you describe Eliphaz's approach to Job's problem?
6. To what did Bildad appeal for his authority in the discussion?
7. What was Bildad's logic in solving Job's dilemma?
8. Zophar depended on _____ for his advice.
9. How did Jehovah interpret the words of the friends?
10. What was the fundamental error in the thinking of these friends?

Joshobeam, Eleazar, Shammah

David's Three Mighty Men

There never was a great ruler who did not have great helpers by his side. David's victories and success were due in large part to the help of men of courage such as Joshebbasshebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah. Their story is recorded in II Samuel 23:8-12 and I Chronicles 11:10-14. It has well been said that crucial events and outstanding leaders call forth great men.

What We Know About These Men

Joshebbasshebeth the Tahchemonite was called Joshobeam for short. His father was Zabdiel (I Chron. 27:2). He served as chief of the captains (I Chron. 11:11, footnote) and personally commanded 24,000 troops in David's army (I Chron. 27:1, 2). Joshobeam had joined David at Ziklag when David was fugitive from the deranged King Saul (I Chron. 12:1-6). In one battle this mighty warrior slew 800 enemy soldiers (II Sam. 23:8). For this feat of courage he was called Adimo the Eznite. In another battle he felled 300 men with his spear (I Chron. 11:11).

Eleazar was the son of Dodai an Ahohite. He once fought the hostile Philistines with such zeal and fierceness that his hand was frozen to the handle of his sword (II Sam. 23:9, 10).

Shammah was the son of Agee, a Haranite. He stood alone against a troop of Philistine scavengers when all others fled (II Sam. 23:11, 12).

The Situation These Men Faced

They were with David their king at Pasdammin near where David had earlier killed Goliath the giant warrior of Gath. The hostile Philistines had gathered a troop of soldiers for the likely purpose of confiscating the barley harvest. The local farmers had fled before the marauders. Joshobeam, Eleazar and Shammah were hopelessly outnumbered in the face of this hoard (I Chron. 11:13).

What They Did That Day

They stood, they fought, and they won. "They stood in the midst of the plot and defended it" (I Chron. 11:14). What fearless and daring courage they showed. They were willing to stand alone for their cause if necessary. They were not intimidated in the face of great odds.

They fought for the right and protected those who could not protect themselves. These men were not about to flee from the barbarian horde even if it meant death.

They won the battle. The Philistines were slain. "Jehovah saved them by a great victory." Evil men are often taken back by the bravery of a righteous man with a noble cause. With God, we will be victorious in every conflict. "Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4).

We Face Great Enemies Who Challenge Our Faith, Moral Standards, and Homes.

To win we must "stand against the wiles of the devil." We must "take up the whole armor of God that [we] may withstand in the evil day . . ." (Eph. 6:10, 13). Like Paul, we must be "set for the defence of the gospel" (Phil. 1:16). We must be willing to "fight the good fight of faith" (I Tim. 6:12); "to contend earnestly for the faith . . ." (Jude 3). If we will stand and fight, we will win the battle. "If God is for us, who is against us?" "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:31, 37).

Those who would make the world a better place must be willing to take their stand and fight the enemy. Many of our Christian sisters fought and won against the deceptive Equal Rights Amendment.

To shut down the porno shops in our communities, we must be willing to do spiritual battle. To keep homosexuals out of our schools and youth organizations, we must stand up and fight for our rights. To stop the useless slaughter of millions of helpless babies by abortion, good people must take up the sword of the spirit and fight. With God's help we can and will win. Victory is already assured for those who fight.

To plant the Lord's kingdom in new lands, we must be willing to fight. Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, and Communists do not want us in their lands. They will oppose our every step. But we can win if we bravely follow the King on the white horse of victory (Rev. 19:11-18).

If we would save the church from perversions and corruptions of false doctrine, we must resist the false teachers in a manful way (Rom. 16:17, 18).

To build a strong faithful church at home we must stand strong for God's Word and way, fight His holy battle, and win. Our strength and advantage in America today were not won by compromise and negotiation, rather each foothold was carved out in the heat of battle by brave men and women who stood, fought, and won.

Conclusion: Early Christians triumphed over corrupted Judaism and pagan Rome "because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony; and [because] they loved not their life even unto death" (Rev. 12:11). That same formula will give us victory today if like Joshobeam, Eleazar, and Shammah, we stand and fight.

Questions

1. What do we know about Joshobeam?
2. How had Eleazer distinguished himself?
3. What was the situation they faced that day?
4. Three phrases sum up their noble achievements that day. State these phrases.
5. We Christians can be sure of victory. I John 4:4 tells why. Discuss the verse and its meaning.
6. Describe the armor God has given us (Eph. 6:10-13).
7. What are some of the battles Christians of today must fight.
8. What are some of God's promises to the Christian soldier?

9. The early Christians won their battle against the pagan Romans. What were the ingredients that gave them victory (Rev. 12:11)?
10. What lesson impressed you most in this study?

Mephibosheth

A Man of Misfortune

We live in a world of misfortune. It is an important lesson of life that we learn to deal with it in our own lives and to be considerate of those who are afflicted. This lesson is about a victim of great misfortune and the kindness extended to him by David, the man after God's own heart.

About the Man

Mephibosheth was the son of the noble Jonathan, prince of the house of Saul (II Sam. 4:4). He was originally called Meribbaal which meant "he that strives with Baal" (I Chron. 8:34).

The days of his youth were dark indeed. His father and most of his relatives were killed in the Philistine wars (I Sam. 31:1-4). "When the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel; and his nurse took him up, and fled . . . it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame . . ." (II Sam. 4:4). For several years then he lived in seclusion in the house of Machir of Lodebar (II Sam. 9:4, 5). He later married and fathered a son named Mica (II Sam. 9:12).

When David secured the throne of Israel, he elevated Mephibosheth to a place of honor (II Sam. 9:1-13). To understand David's actions, we must remember his friendship with Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan. The historian of I Samuel tells us that "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David . . ." (18:1). Jonathan exacted an oath from David that when fortunes changed, his family would be spared when David became king (I Sam. 20:14-16). Together they swore, "Jehovah shall be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever" (I Sam. 20:42). David never forgot that pledge of friendship.

When Mephibosheth was summoned into the new king's presence, we can imagine the fear and trepidation he must

have felt. Some 15-20 years had now elapsed. It is doubtful that he would have known or remembered the friendship of David and his father. It was a common practice in those days for a conquering king to destroy all remaining male heirs lest they be a rallying point for rebels. Thus we read that Jehu smote all of Ahab's heirs (II Kings 10:11). His fears melted, however, when he heard David's joyful words, "Fear not, for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake" (II Sam. 9:7a). His family inheritance was restored, and the king granted him an endowment for life along with a place of honor at the royal court (II Sam. 9:7b-10).

Trouble in Israel

Dark clouds settled upon the nation when David's son Absalom led a rebellion against his father's rule. As the uprising spread like wildfire, David and his servants fled Jerusalem for mountain hideouts (II Sam. 15:13, 14). Mephibosheth was betrayed by his servant, Zeba, who slanderously accused his master of hoping to regain the throne. Believing the lie, David rashly apportioned all of the young cripple's estate to the deceitful Zeba (II Sam. 16:1-4).

Following Absalom's untimely death, David returned to his throne with power. Mephibosheth, the son of Saul came down to meet the king and welcome him home. He had publicly mourned David's misfortune and was still dressed in the signs of mourning. He explained why he had not been able to join the king in exile and exposed Zeba's slanderous charges. No favors were asked. He would gladly accept David's judgment in the matter (II Sam. 19:24-30).

At a later date, David again had occasion to spare Mephibosheth's life, when the men of Gibeon sought revenge against Saul's heirs for the evil he had done in slaughtering many of their people (II Sam. 19:4-7).

Some Observations About Mephibosheth's Life

Truly our subject was a man of many misfortunes. He was orphaned at age 5, losing his entire family in the violence of war. At the same time, he lost his right to the throne of the nation. A freakish accident left him crippled for life. Through

the slanderous lies of his own servant, he lost his station, his property, and almost his own life. Even when the truth was known, he regained only one-half of his inheritance (II Sam. 19:29).

Mephibosheth had a noble attitude amid all of his vicissitudes. He was deeply grateful to David for his consideration. He harbored no bitterness about his loss. He had no thought of trying to subvert David's authority. Willingly, he submitted to his new lord. All of these wholesome traits were a reflection of Jonathan's spirit in his son's character.

By the grace of king David, this poor man received provisions, honor, and safety. His reward was not because of his own merit, but because of his father's goodness which David sought to repay.

Lessons to Remember

We are impressed with the beauty and loyalty of true friendship such as was shared by David and Jonathan.

From David we learn to honor our commitments, no matter how much time may have passed by.

Also, we must learn to show compassion for the unfortunate that are about us. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto Jehovah, and his good deed will he pay him again" (Prov. 19:17).

Christians, like David, must be generous towards all men, especially those of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

We need to exhibit the gratitude that Mephibosheth showed towards his benefactor.

This man was withered in body but not in soul. Some folks have healthy bodies but crippled souls.

We are reminded of the evil a slanderer can do if he is listened to. "A whisper separateth chief friends" (Prov. 16:28). "But a false witness shall not be unpunished . . ." (Prov. 19:5).

May our children be fortunate to have noble parents like Jonathan. "A righteous man that walketh in his integrity, Blessed are his children after him" (Prov. 20:7).

David showed Mephibosheth “the kindness of Jehovah” (I Sam. 20:14). Christ has shown it to us by saving our souls (Titus 3:4, 5).

Mephibosheth’s blessing had nothing to do with his intellect, his goodness, his wealth, or infirmity. He was blest because of whose son he was. So with us.

One of his blessings was to eat continually at the king’s table. Such is our privilege as well (Luke 22:29, 30).

May we not neglect these lessons from this little-known man’s life.

Questions

1. What do we know about Mephibosheth’s family?
2. What caused his lameness?
3. This young man suffered much beyond his physical affliction. Discuss these other sorrows.
4. Why did David choose to elevate this unfortunate heir of the vanquished dynasty?
5. How do you imagine that Mephibosheth felt when called to appear before the new king?
6. What happened to cause David to take away Mephibosheth’s possessions and give them to others?
7. What can we learn of Mephibosheth’s attitude toward his misfortune?
8. What lesson do we learn from David’s involvement in this episode?
9. What practical opportunities do we have to show compassion in our modern world?
10. What are the most memorable lessons you recall from this story?

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 David, king of Israel, and Bathsheba (II Sam. 12:24). He was the tenth 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” (II Sam. 12:24, 25). Growing up, the young prince enjoyed all the advantages of a king’s son. He was blest 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 (I Chron. 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 him and bring him to sit upon the royal throne (I Kings 5:53). "They blew the trumpet; and all the people said, Long live king Solomon . . . and rejoiced with great joy . . ." (I 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 (I 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" (I 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" (I 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 (II Chron. 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 (I 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 (II Chron. 8:17, 18). Israel's national treasury burgeoned with 666 talents of gold flowing in annually, plus all the other sources of wealth (II Chron. 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 . . ." (II Chron. 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 (I Kings 4:21). For forty years he ruled in pomp and power (I 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 (Eccles. 12:9). Of his 1,005 songs, we have only three (I 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 on moral philosophy, describing the author's search for meaning and happiness in life; *Song of Solomon* which celebrates the beauties of married love and Psalms 72 and 127.

Solomon's Religious Life

"Solomon loved Jehovah, walking in the statutes of David his father . . ." (I Kings 3:3). He worshipped the Lord and sought to please Him (I 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" (I Kings 11:1-3). Such marriages were usually designed to cement political alliances. But God had forbidden such alliances (Deut. 7:2-5). He built a strong military machine which God also forbade (Deut. 17:16). He dedicated himself to a life of materialism and indulgence which God specifically condemned (Eccles. 2:1-10). The God

whose law he broke judged him (Deut. 17:14-17). His idolatrous wives turned his heart away from the Lord. He built the shrine for their gods; he worshipped their idols, and God was angry with him (I 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 (Eccles. 1:14). Only in fearing God and keeping His commandments did he find the prize he sought (Eccles. 12:13).

His lavish programs were a burden to his subjects and brought the nation to the brink of disaster (I Kings 12:4). This 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 (Eccles. 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 God (II Cor. 6:14-16).

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

Questions

1. What do we know about Solomon's early life and home?
2. How old was Solomon when he was crowned?
3. Discuss some of Solomon's building projects.
4. What was the extent of his kingdom?
5. In what areas did the king show special wisdom?
6. Name the books Solomon wrote.
7. How would you describe his religious life.
8. What are the likely reasons for Solomon's taking so many wives?
9. What does the book of Ecclesiastes tell us about Solomon's life?
10. What lesson of permanent value have you learned from Solomon's life?

The Shulamite Bride

King Solomon penned 1,005 songs during his illustrious career (I Kings 4:32). The Hebrews judged his song about his Shulamite bride to be his best. They called it "The Song of Songs." Our translations label it the Song of Solomon. Jewish rabbis compared Solomon's writings to their temple: Ecclesiastes they likened to the outer court, Proverbs to the holy place, and the Song of Solomon to the holy of holies.

This is one of the least studied and therefore least understood books of our Bible. Aglen wrote, "The Song of Solomon . . . holds . . . first place among the puzzles of literature." Franz Delitzsch called it "the most obscure book of the Old Testament."

No book of Scripture has provoked more controversy than this one. God's name is mentioned only once and that indirectly. Not grasping its meaning, some have questioned its right to be in the canon of sacred Scripture. Jerome tells us that the ancient Jews discouraged their young folks from reading the Song until age 30.

Some Hints for Understanding the Song

One cannot understand this lovely song unless he treats it as poetry rather than prose. Remember that we grant the poet a broad license for flowery expression. Furthermore, it is Oriental poetry. Orientals revel in figures of speech at which we Westerners are shocked. Nothing in the song would offend the most modest Oriental. "The book is a wedding song containing collections of the antenuptial experience of Solomon and the Shulamite. The events mentioned . . . depict the emotions of the lovers in times of union and separation." (John Raven). The Song celebrates the beauties of married, monogamous love.

The book is best understood as an operetta with dramatic scenes, dialogues and songs. The cast of characters includes Solomon, King of Israel, Shulamite, the bride from northern

Israel, and the daughters of Jerusalem who were her maiden court attendants and who serve as the chorus.

About the Bride

Chapter 6:13 calls her Shulamite. Her name is a feminine form of Solomon. Hence we have both the prince and princess of peace, for that is the meaning of "Solomon." She was a farm girl from northern Israel, who by her beauty and purity captured the king's heart (7:10-12). She was darkly tanned from working in the vineyards of her family (1:5-6). Solomon evidently met her while traveling in her region and courted her with the hope of making her his bride.

Intoxicated with her love and beauty, he painted a poetic picture of her:

I have compared thee, O my love,
To a steed in Pharaoh's chariots (proud and majestic).
Thy neck with strings of jewels.
We will make thee plaits of gold
With studs of silver (1:9-11).

After their marriage, he wrote:

Thou art fair, O my love, as Tirzah [a scenic city of Palestine],
Comely as Jerusalem,
Terrible as an army with banners [majestic and awesome].
Turn away thine eyes from me
For they have overcome me.
Thy hair is as a flock of goats [shiny black],
That lie along the side of Gilead.
Thy teeth are like a flock of ewes,
Which are coming up from the washing [clean and white]
Whereof everyone hath twins,
And none is bereaved among them [no teeth were missing].
Thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate [rosy cheeks]
Behind thy veil. (6:4-7).

Her beauty excelled that of all the other 60 queens and 80 concubines of Solomon's harem (6:8, 9).

In chapter 5:10-16 she describes Solomon as seen through her eyes of love:

My beloved is white and ruddy [a light complexion was cherished in
a land of dark-skinned people. He had ruddy cheeks].

The chiefest among ten thousand.
His head is as the most fine gold;
His locks are busy and black as a raven [black curly hair].
His eyes are like doves beside the water-brooks,
Washed with milk, and fitly set [not bloodshot nor crossed].
His cheeks are as a bed of spices [he used a nice cologne]
As banks of sweet herbs:
His lips are as lilies, dripping liquid myrrh [sweet kisses].
His hands are as rings of gold set with beryl [fine rings].
His body is as ivory work overlaid with sapphires.
His legs as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold [strong
and attractive];
His aspect is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.
His mouth is most sweet;
Yea, he is altogether lovely (5:10-16).

In chapter 3:6-11 we are given a glimpse of the royal groom coming to claim his bride. The chorus of attendants ask:

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness
Like pillars of smoke [perhaps the dust of his entourage on the road].
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense
With all powders of the merchant?
Behold it is the litter of Solomon:
Threescore mighty men are about it [his body guards].
Of the mighty men of Israel.
They all handle the sword, and are expert in war:
Every man hath his sword upon his thigh.
Because of fear in the night.
King Solomon made himself a palaquin [his sedan-chair],
Of the wood of Lebanon [made of cedar of Lebanon].
He made the pillars thereof, of silver
The bottom thereof, of gold, the seat of it of purple,
The midst thereof being paved with love,
From the daughters of Jerusalem [probably pillows made as wed-
ding gifts from her court attendants].

The bride says:

Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon;
With the crown wherewith his mother had crowned him [a garland
worn as a token of her approval and blessing].
In the day of his espousals [his wedding-day]
And in the day of the gladness of his heart.

We are granted a brief view of their wedding feast in 5:1.
The groom toasts his bride as they drink the cup of blessing.
Solomon says:

I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride:
 I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
 I have eaten my honeycomb, with my honey;
 I have drunk my wine with milk.

He then charges his guests:

Eat, O friends:
 Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

The climax of this lovely book is seen in 8:6, 7 where the couple sings the praises of true romantic love.

First, we see the *demands of love*. Shulamite says, "Set me as a seal upon thy heart." The king evidently wore his royal seal of office on a chain about his neck. It was always with him, next to his heart. It was a precious and cherished object to him. The bride wanted always to have that kind of relationship with her husband, as does every true lover.

We see the *strength of love*. She reminds him that "love is strong as death." Death never lets go of those it embraces. Death cannot be bribed or deceived; it never gets discouraged in its pursuit. The same is true of genuine love. It spans oceans and years and will endure a world of pain. Love is not easily turned aside. In a house with many wives, one would not automatically enjoy the husband's daily company.

She speaks of the *cruelty of jealousy*. It is "cruel as Sheol." Nothing is more destructive and devastating to a relationship than jealousy. This deadly emotion will poison and kill the very love it seeks to preserve for itself. It is deadly as a bolt of lightning, "the flame of Jehovah." In a polygamous family, jealousy is a constant problem between wives. Jacob's wives had the problem (Gen. 30:1-24). Perhaps Shulamite had already tasted the bitter cup from other of Solomon's wives.

We are reminded of the *design of love*. "Love is of God" (I John 4:7). Made in His image, we are capable of loving. He made us male and female so we could know such love. Marriage was ordained to provide a holy realm for that love (Heb. 13:4).

Love is unquenchable, responds Solomon. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." Like an eternal flame fed from some unseen source, love burns in the human bosom.

Love has no price tag. “If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be condemned.” To attempt to buy love is to insult it. Love can endure poverty, but not insult.

Lessons to Remember

Bunsen writes, “There would be something wanting in the Bible, if there was not found there an expression of the deepest and strongest of human feelings.”

Someone said, “If you would be holy, read the Psalms; if you would be wise, read Proverbs; but if you would learn love’s language and understand the action of love to establish real and lasting communion, read the Song of Songs.”

Surely God placed the Song in the canon to teach us the purity and sanctity of monogamous love in marriage, which He ordained in Eden. Thus, this is a veiled protest against polygamy.

As we reflect on their beautiful celebration of love, let us remember the divine relationship of Christ and His church (Eph. 5:22, 23).

Questions

1. To what did the ancient Jews liken the Song of Solomon?
2. To correctly understand the Song of Solomon what must be remembered?
3. What does the bride’s name mean?
4. What do we know of her early home life?
5. Describe the impression she made on Solomon?
6. What was the garland the groom’s mother gave him?
7. Why did she wish to be “as a seal upon” his heart?
8. In what way is love as strong as death?
9. How is love as cruel as Sheol?
10. Why would 8:6, 7 be considered the climax of this little book?

Jehu

The Executioner

The history of Israel's kings is a mixed story. Few of them were righteous men who honored Jehovah. Yet, in Daniel the prophet, we are told that "the most high ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the lowest of men" (Dan. 4:17). One of those base men that God raised up to accomplish His will was Jehu, king of Northern Israel. His record is set forth in II Kings 9 and 10. Jehu's example is not for us to follow; rather, it is for us to avoid. He was surely the most unlovely of all Israel's heroes. He totally lacked the virtues of patience, pity, mercy, and kindness.

About the Man

The name "Jehu" meant "Jehovah is he." His father was Jehoshaphat, and his grandfather was Nimshi (II Kings 9:14). He first served as a captain in the army of Ahab, king of Israel, and later served his son, Joram (9:4-6). His driving habits had gained Jehu a reputation among the troops. He drove his chariot "furiously" (9:20).

His Anointing

In the year 845 Elisha the prophet sent a messenger to the prospective leader. His instructions were "take the vial of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith Jehovah, I have anointed thee king over Israel . . ." (9:1-3). This was his second anointing. Elijah had done the same some 15 years earlier (I Kings 19:15, 16). Thus, when the second message came from God, Jehu was ready to accept the challenge and go into action. His divinely appointed mission was to avenge the blood of martyred saints on the house of Ahab and Jezebel. "Thus saith Jehovah, . . . I have anointed thee king over the people of Jehovah . . . and thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge . . . the blood of all the servants of Jehovah at the hand of Jezebel" (9:6, 7).

His Bloody Revolution

Jehu's fellow officers immediately joined his cause. They welcomed his appointment with a celebration (9:13). The first to fall victim to his wrath was Joram, son of Ahab. He was smitten at the site of Naboth's vineyard which his evil parents had cruelly and unjustly taken years before. Being pierced with an arrow, Joram was denied a proper burial; his body was cast out in Naboth's land as a memorial to God's justice (9:22-26). When Ahaziah, king of Judah, saw this, he immediately fled. "And Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot: and they smote him at the ascent of Gur . . ." (9:27, 28). Ahaziah, though king of Judah, was a grandson to Ahab by his daughter Athaliah.

Next to fall in the bloody coup was Jezebel, the evil queen mother (9:30-37). The aged matron sought to use her faded charms to save her life. But Jehu, unmoved, ordered her servants to cast her down from the upper window. Ruthlessly he drove his horses over her broken body. Worse yet, her corpse was left for the street dogs to devour. This fate Elijah had predicted 15 years before. "And of Jezebel also spake Jehovah, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the rampart of Jezreel" (I Kings 21:23).

Ahab's dynasty of 70 sons were then summarily executed by beheading. Their severed heads being delivered to him in baskets, the bloody reformer ordered: "Lay ye them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until the morning" (10:1-10). This struck terror in the heart of every sympathizer of the old regime as well as eliminating any possibility of a move to restore the old dynasty.

Additionally, Jehu smote all that remained of the house of Ahab "and all his great men and his familiar friends, and his priests, until he left him none remaining" (10:11). The brethren of Ahaziah had the misfortune to encounter the vengeful king, and 42 of them also perished (10:12-14). Such barbarity shocks our civilized mind, but it was a common practice in the world of Eastern tyrants. Even now we see blood purges when Communism gains power or in third-world revolutions.

The bloody assize of Jehu was not yet completed. Next, he conspired to wipe out the Baal worshipers of the land. Calling

for a great assembly to worship Baal, he pretended to worship that pagan god. At the appointed moment, his troops swept down on the idolators and smote them one and all with the edge of the sword. The troops proceeded to destroy the sacred images and broke down the Baal temple (10:18-27). "And Jehovah said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, thy sons of the fourth generations shall sit on the throne of Israel" (10:30). God, the creator of man, the wholly righteous judge and the giver of thrones and power, had the right to exact such capital punishment on people who were void of all good and without excuse.

His Reign

"Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria . . . twenty and eight years" (10:36). Four generations of his heirs succeeded him in power (10:30). More than any other being, he was successful in stamping out the corrupting Baal worship of the people (10:28). Because he "took no heed to walk in the law of Jehovah," the Lord allowed Hazael, king of Syria, to take much of his kingdom (10:32, 33). Jehu was an ambitious, crafty man. He pursued his course with hasty, unrelenting energy showing neither fear nor pity. He ruled with great energy, boldness, and enterprize, shrinking from no difficulty. The only surviving portrait of a Hebrew king is that of Jehu bowing, face to the ground, before the great king of Assyria.

His Failures

The bloody revolution failed to complete his purge of idolatry from his kingdom. He left the golden calves that were in Bethel, and in . . . Dan" (10:29). He then fell into the very idolatry first introduced by Jeroboam, son of Nebat. It was ironic that he took up the very evil he had fought so furiously in an earlier time. Evidently he had learned nothing from their sin and judgment. "He took no heed to walk in the law of Jehovah" (10:31). Destructive work on others was easily done, but to humble his own will before Jehovah was too hard for him. Even his zeal for God was faulty; it was mingled with boastfulness, mixed with treachery, cruelty and deceit (10:16-

19). He was excessive in purging the family and associates of Ahab. Hosea, the prophet, later announced God's plan to "avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu" (Hosea 1:4). Like a wild beast, he wallowed in a river of blood. He enjoyed his bloody, violent work. Jehu destroyed much but built up nothing. He had no personal love for God. His zeal was more for his own cause. His evil far outweighed his good!

Lessons to Remember

God chooses men who are suited for the specific purpose to do His tasks (Isaiah 10:5-12). Jehu was needed to purge Israel of the evil influence of Ahab and Jezebel and the plague of Baalism they had introduced. When called, he responded with destructive thoroughness.

"Jehu stands in history as a warning rather than as an example" (Joseph Parker). We Christians could never imitate Jehu's violent persecutions of false religion. We are bound to pray even for our persecutors (Matt. 5:43, 44).

Jehu destroyed Baalism with the sword, but it sprung up again in a later generation. Our weapons against sin and error are spiritual, not carnal (II Cor. 10:3-5). We fight these evils with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17).

Any reformation will fail if it does not thoroughly root out the evil toward which it is directed. The hand that struck down Baal spared the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. It was here that Jehu failed.

Jehu surrendered his sword to Jehovah but not his soul. To him religion was just a political instrument to advance his personal cause.

In him we learn that the thirst for blood, once aroused, is not readily slacked.

This king is an example of reckless zeal—out of control. He was a zealot in the worst meaning of the term. Many are like Jehu in the Lord's church; they plunge into matters of grave importance with unbridled zeal and do more harm than good.

We learn to beware the preaching brother who enjoys smiting heretics and non-conformists in the church. Usually the slaughter knows no end.

Even Jehu's sordid career was recorded for our example that we might avoid his excesses (I Cor. 10:6).

Questions

1. In what way is Jehu an example for us?
2. What was his divinely appointed mission?
3. What was his attitude toward the Lord's law?
4. How would you describe his reign?
5. Discuss his conflicting attitudes toward idolatry.
6. If God chose Jehu to be an agent of judgment on Ahab and Jezebel, why would He later "avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu"? (Hosea 1:4).
7. Can we as Christians use violence against corrupting, evil religion that fights against God's Cause? Why?
8. With what weapon can we fight false religion?
9. Discuss Jehu's failures in the realm of religion.
10. What lesson from Jehu's career impresses you most?

Jehoiakim

The King Who Hated God's Word

A nation is blessed or cursed, depending upon the quality of her leadership. The kingdom of Judah had the misfortune of having a number of kings who were unworthy of their high office. Jehoiakim was such a king. "He did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah his God . . . now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did . . . behold they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah . . ." (II Chron. 36:5-8).

About the Man

At birth, he was named Eliakim which meant "raised up by God." When placed on the throne of Judah by the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho, his name was changed to Jehoiakim (II Kings 23:34). The home he was born into was a good one. His father was the righteous and godly king, Josiah. His mother was Zebidah, daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah (II Kings 23:36). The blood of the noble king David flowed in his veins. As a child he was privileged to grow up in the midst of a great spiritual revival led by his father. In Josiah's house, he would have been exposed to great men of God such as Jeremiah and Zephaniah. He would have observed how important the Scriptures, the temple, and the worship of God were to his saintly father. His times were the turbulent years 633-598 B.C.

His Reign as King

Jehoiakim received his throne when his father Josiah met an untimely death at the hands of the Egyptians (II Kings 23:29, 20). The natural heir to succeed to the throne was his brother, Jehoahaz. After a short reign of three months, Pharaoh Necho removed him and installed Jehoiakim. Jehoahaz spent the rest of his years as a captive in Egypt (II Kings 23:31-34).

Jehoiakim was 25 years of age at his ascension, the eighteenth ruler of David dynasty. He ruled from 609 to 598 B.C., a total of eleven years. His first eight years were spent as vassal to Egypt, his last three to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (II Kings 23:35-24:1).

Jehoiakim “did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah . . .” He rebelled against his Babylonian overlords (II Kings 23:1, 2). As punishment for his and the nation’s sins, God sent repeated assaults of heathen armies against his kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar and his troops took the city and bound Jehoiakim in fetters to lead him away to Babylon (II Chron. 36:6). Evidently he died before the departure and was left unburied as prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 22:18-19). There would be no lamentation for so wicked a man. His burial would be like that of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem. His carcass would be left to the heat of the day and frost of night (Jer. 36:30). His son Jehoiachin was removed after three short months as king, and the crown bestowed on Jehoiakim’s brother, Zedekiah (II Kings 24:15-17).

His Life and Administration

Being under tribute to foreign kings, Jehoiakim passed the burden to his subjects by laying heavy taxes on them (II Kings 23:35). In addition to this hardship, he engaged in great building projects using forced labor to accomplish his goals (Jer. 22:13-15). The divine record leads us to conclude that he was one of the most worthless princes ever to sit on David’s throne. He did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah. He filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. Human life was not held sacred by him. He was covetous, oppressive, and violent (Jer. 22:17). When the prophet Uriah dared to openly speak against his administration, “the king sought to put him to death” (Jer. 26:20-23). When Jeremiah’s writings were presented to him, he burned them with contempt (Jer. 36:1-26). Greenbough paints the following sketch of this wretched ruler:

He was a poor, weak-brained, berattled simpleton, whom his flatterers and countesses had persuaded to regard himself as a Solomon. A man steeped in vice, a coward and a braggart, with a vast stock of obstinacy and bravado, and a huge opinion of himself, but without a speck of real courage and manliness.

Lessons to Remember

An old proverb says, "A child and a fool should never be given a knife, for each will use it either in whittling on things he should not or else he will injure himself." A fool such as Jehoiakim should never have occupied a throne.

God hates hands that shed innocent blood (Prov. 6:16, 17). Jehoiakim's crimes of violence against his fellow men did not go unpunished, nor will those of present day murderers, war-mongers, and abortionists.

In this king's life we see the truth of Paul's saying, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). The same principle of judgment still prevails in the world. Sinners, beware!

History teaches us that woe comes to the man who fights against God's preachers, God's Word, or God's kingdom. God's Word is like fire that devours and like a hammer to smash its opponents (Jer. 23:29). Those who do harm to God's preachers must answer to their Master (II Kings 1:9-12). God warns us, "Touch not mine anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm" (I Chron. 16:22). God's kingdom will break in pieces and consume all of its enemies (Dan. 2:44).

Jehoiakim was not the last man who sought to destroy God's word. Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria (175-163 B.C) ordered that "every copy of the law [of God] was to be surrendered to the authorities and be destroyed . . ." (Alfred Edersheim, *History of the Jewish Nation*, p. 11).

In 303 A.D. the Roman emperor, Diocletian, ordered all copies of the sacred writings destroyed (*Neander's History of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, p. 48). Pope Innocent in 1199 A.D. ordered French Bibles burned at Metz and forbade the people to have more. The Council of Tarragona in Spain under Pope Gregory IX (1234 A.D.) ordered all people to surrender their Bibles for burning. William Tyndale was martyred for his work in translating the Scriptures. Thousands of Bibles were burned at St. Paul's crossing in London by order of Bishop Tonstal (see George DeHoff, *Why I Believe the Bible*, pp. 115-116). Thomas Paine, the American infidel, in his *Age of Reason*, predicted that "Fifty years hence, the Bible will be ob-

solete and forgotten. Theological liberals claim to be wise enough to weigh the Scriptures and cast out those parts they do not approve of. Communism in Russia, Europe, and China has waged a fierce but losing battle against the Word of God.

Mark it down: Men do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself, but because it contradicts them! Jesus left us this solemn promise: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

Poor Jehoiakim: the Scripture he hated is known and honored in the hearts of millions, but his wretched name is all but forgotten. He fought against God's Word and lost!

Questions

1. How did the king get his name and his throne?
2. What kind of home did he grow up in?
3. What do we know about his reign and the way he treated his subjects?
4. Compared to other kings of Judah, how did he rate?
5. How did he deal with God's prophets who prophesied against his misdeeds?
6. What kind of character did he possess?
7. Discuss the circumstances when he burned the Scriptures (Jer. 36:1-26).
8. What was the end of Jehoiakim?
9. Discuss some other attempts of men to destroy God's Word.
10. Why do men reject the Bible?

Habakkuk

The Troubled Believer

Habakkuk is one of those little-known men of Scripture whose message is of immense practical value to twentieth century man.

About the Man

We know nothing of Habakkuk save that written in his small book. He was a prophet in the kingdom of Judah during the last quarter of the seventh century B.C. His world was rotting at the core; flying apart at the seams. Wickedness prevailed in his homeland. God seemed to be totally unconcerned, doing nothing to rectify the situation (1:2-4). The prophet's tract is like a page out of his personal diary, recording his doubts and complaints poured out to God in prayer—and the answers he found.

His Doubt Expressed

"O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save" (1:2). It seemed as though God was ignoring his prayer. Wickedness was prevailing. On every hand was violence and destruction, strife and contention (1:3). The law of God was chilled or paralyzed, and justice was perverted (1:4).

Anon, God did answer his prayer. He was long since engaged, working a work which the prophet would not believe though told (1:5). Wicked Judah would be punished as justice demanded. The bitter and hasty Chaldeans would be God's instrument of judgment on His rebellious people. They would come for destruction and then pass and be gone like a stormy wind (1:6-11).

Doubts Upon Doubt

As predicted, the answer did not satisfy the bewildered soul of Habakkuk (1:12, 13). God's answer raised even more

problems in his troubled mind. He asked God, "How could you do such a thing?" How could the holy God use a wicked nation like Babylon as the agent of His will? How could God allow the wicked to swallow up a man more righteous than himself? Habakkuk did not understand that the sovereign God can use an evil nation for purposes of chastisement and then destroy them because of their own wickedness. Isaiah defines this great doctrine in his tenth chapter, verses 5-19. God said the Assyrian king was "the rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation. I will send him against a profane nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge." The Assyrian was not even aware of God's plan, "but it was in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations . . ." Wherefore when the Lord had performed His whole work of discipline upon Jerusalem He promised, "I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria . . ."

Faith's Determination

Even though he had not yet fathomed God's plan and method, faith prevailed over doubt in Habakkuk's heart. He resolved to stand upon his watch tower and patiently wait for God to reveal the end of the matter to him (2:1). The root of true faith is *trust* in God's providence to handle things aright.

His waiting was rewarded, for God gave him the answer in words he could understand. "And Jehovah . . . said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tablets, that he may run that readeth it." In a short while judgment would come upon the proud Babylonians, "but the righteous shall live by his faith" (2:2-4). The antithesis makes the point clearer. The wicked nation would not survive, but the faithful remnant of Hebrews would live through it all triumphantly because of their faith in God.

Following a series of five woes of judgment pronounced upon the Chaldeans, he saw the great Jehovah seated on the throne of the universe, in control of every situation. Therefore all the earth, including the complaining prophet, had best keep silence before Him. Let there be no criticism of the divine Ruler's way of ordering His world aright.

With the poet we sing a similar song today:

Jesus Savior pilot me
 Over life's tempestuous sea.
 Unknown waves around me roll
 Hiding rock and treacherous shoal;
 Chart and compass come from Thee,
 Jesus Savior, pilot me.

His faith renewed and his spirits now bouyed against the storm, Habakkuk wrote a beautiful hymn to celebrate the victory. He sang:

O Jehovah, revive thy work . . .
 In the midst of the years make it known;
 In wrath remember mercy (3:2).

Then he was rewarded with a thrilling vision of God's future plan. He saw God coming up from Teman—even as the light of His presence had led Israel through the wilderness (3:3).

He stood and measured [or surveyed the earth]:
 He beheld, and drove asunder the nations [Babylon]" (3:6).
 [He] marched through the land in indignation.
 [He] threshed the nations in anger.
 [He] wentest forth for the salvation of [his] people (3:12, 13).

Such scenes of divine intervention in the affairs of men thrill the soul and move us in times of danger to sing:

Mine eyes have seen the glory
 Of the coming of the Lord.
 He is trampling out the vineyards
 Where the grapes of wrath are stored.
 We have seen the fateful lightning
 Of His terrible swift sword;
 Our God is marching on.

The prophet closes with three great lessons he had learned. We must "wait quietly for the day of trouble" (3:16). This speaks of patience, quietly suggesting that we must not fall into murmuring and complaining at our lot. We must "rejoice in Jehovah . . . the God of [our] salvation" (3:18). No matter what happens, we must rejoice in Him. We can be confident of the future for:

Jehovah . . . is my strength . . .
 He maketh my feet like hinds' feet,
 And will make me to walk upon high places (3:19).

The victory will ultimately be ours.

Lessons to Remember

There are times when our world seems to fall apart as it did in Habakkuk's day. At times our prayers seem unanswered, and God's ways confuse us. When such is our lot, we need to remember that a doubting mind needs a devoted heart. God never scolds the sincere questioner.

Be thankful for questions: they inspire us, humble us, provoke us, and drive us to search out the marvelous will of God.

When Habakkuk only looked at his circumstances, he was bewildered and confused (1:3). When he waited for God and listened to His word, he rejoiced in song (3:18, 19).

Since God's ways and thoughts are superior to ours, we should not expect to fully fathom everything He does or allows to be done (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

In times of doubt and trouble, God wants us to look to Him and await His answer. "Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding: In all thy ways acknowledge him, he will direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5, 6).

The real purpose of religion is not to have doubt removed, but to help us be sure of God's control of our lives and world.

Be assured that the righteous man by his faithfulness to God will live and walk triumphantly in the high places.

When our perplexing problems come, and come they will, we must also mount the watch tower of faith and catch the vision of God at work in His world.

Questions

1. Describe Habakkuk's world situation.
2. What was the first doubt the prophet expressed?
3. How did God answer Habakkuk's question?

4. Discuss the prophet's second question: How could a holy God use a wicked nation to punish His people?
5. How does God deal with wicked nations after using them as instruments of punishment?
6. Discuss the role of *trust* in devout faith in God.
7. What was the message God told him to write upon tablets?
8. What is the meaning of "the righteous shall live by faith"?
9. What was the significance of his vision of God upon His throne?
10. Discuss the points of Habakkuk's experience which impress you most.

Simeon

The Faithful

When the Son of God came to the temple in Jerusalem for His first visit and dedication, no committee of priests or rabbis were there to greet Him; no proclamation of the king was read. Yet God did not let the occasion pass without proper recognition. From the faithful remnant of true worshippers, He raised up holy saints to honor the Master's arrival.

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him, and it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus . . . then he received him into his arms, and blessed God . . . (Luke 2: 25-28).

The Occasion

Paul informs us that "God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, *born under the law*" (Gal. 4:4). The law required two things following childbirth. Childbirth left the mother ceremonially unclean. To be cleansed she had to bring a burnt-offering and "a sin-offering, unto the door of the tent of meeting unto the priest; and he shall offer it before Jehovah, and make atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed . . ." (Lev. 12:2-8). The fact that she brought "a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24) indicates that they were a poor family, else they would have offered a lamb (Lev. 12:8). Also he being their first-born, it was necessary that they observe the ceremony of redemption for him (Exo. 13:11-13; Num. 18:15, 16).

About the Man

Simeon was a *devout* Hebrew (Luke 2:25). His home was evidently in Jerusalem, the holy city. He was an aged man

whose life had been spent in service to his God. In character, he was *righteous* concerning God's law and faithful in his loyalty and worship to God. He was constantly looking for the consolation of Israel, their cherished Messiah. The Holy Spirit of God was upon him. Other Hebrews referred to such people as Simeon as "the quiet of the land."

His Example For Us

Great *hope* filled old Simeon's heart as he looked for the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25). That hope of Israel was God's Messiah. Ancient prophets had predicted his coming. Isaiah wrote:

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 . . . (9:6, 7).

The Messianic hope burned white hot in Israel in those days. Such hope gave Simeon something to live for—it gave meaning to his life. All around him was despair. An evil, corrupt king, Herod the Idumean, held the throne. The cursed Romans were their military masters. The high priest's office was traded as a market commodity to the highest bidder. The priests that served the temple of God were largely degenerates. The cold, lifeless legalism of the Pharisees dominated the synagogues. The blind fanaticism of the Essenes and Zealots poisoned men's souls. But Simeon hoped for better days.

Simeon was privileged to see his Messiah in the flesh, to hold Him in his arms (Luke 2:27, 28). For that matchless privilege he had waited a lifetime. Millions to this day would have been eager to share it with him. There were no spectacular miracles or wonders—no royal pageantry accompanied the Lord's presentation. There were the peasant parents and a helpless infant; yet, that humble scene did not discourage God's friend, Simeon.

His Song is recorded in verses 29-31:

Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord,
According to Thy word, in peace;

For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples:
A light for revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of thy people Israel.

This hymn, the oldest of the faith, has been sung for 1900 years. It is called in Latin, *Nunc Demittis*. Simeon saw Messiah as few Jews ever did; that He was to be Savior of all men whether Jew or Gentile.

By the Holy Spirit he was led to prophesy of the child's future. "Behold this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against" (Luke 2:34). Such "men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:21). Isaiah had pictured the Christ as "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel" (Isaiah 8:14). Years later, "he came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God . . ." (John 1:11, 12).

He predicted that he would reveal the thoughts of many hearts (Luke 2:35). The Hebrew writer reminds us that Christ is "quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:12, 13).

He foresaw the terrible sorrow his mother would one day know (Luke 2:35). It was almost as though he had stood at the foot of the cross with Mary and described her anguish and grief (John 19:25).

We are impressed by his view of death. "Now lettest thy servant depart, Lord, according to thy word, in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2:29, 30). Death to Simeon was a *release* or a *dismissing* to go home to God. No one is ready to die in peace until he, too, has seen and embraced the Christ. "Blessed are the dead who *die in the Lord* . . ." (Rev. 14:13). "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints," wrote David (Psa. 116:15).

Lessons to Remember

May we be numbered among that faithful remnant who are ever waiting before the Lord. Remember, only those who are faithful unto death will receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Ever be grateful that God shared Israel's Messiah with us Gentiles. We were without God and without hope until that day (Eph. 2:11).

We will determine for ourselves if we are among those who *rise*, or those who *fall* before Messiah. Have you received Him? (John 1:11, 12). Let us so live our lives that we can sing Simeon's lovely song: "Now lettest thy servant depart, Lord, according to thy word, in peace." We can say that only if we have seen, embraced, and faithfully served Jesus "the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Questions

1. Why was Jesus brought to the temple at this early date?
2. What do we know about the man Simeon?
3. Discuss the hope that filled his heart.
4. What aspect of the Messiah did Simeon see that few other Jews understood?
5. How was Simeon able to know all he did about the infant's future?
6. How did Simeon view his impending death?
7. Discuss "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints" (Psa. 116:15).
8. Discuss the meaning of some rising and others falling before the Messiah.
9. What people constitute God's faithful remnant today?
10. What lesson from Simeon most impresses you?

James

The Brother of Jesus

A little-known, yet fascinating, Bible character is James the brother of Jesus. Several bits of information gathered from the Scriptures provide us a beautiful mosaic of this good man.

His Early Life

James was born into the family of Joseph and Mary of Nazareth. His siblings were Jesus, Joses, Judas, Simon, and several sisters (Mark 6:3). To protect their doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, Roman Catholic scholars deny that these were actually Mary's children. Some say they were Joseph's children by a prior marriage; that Joseph was widowed before he took Mary. Others argue that these are actually cousins of Jesus, called brothers and sisters only in the sense of "relatives." But there is absolutely no reason to understand the words in any other way than literal. There is not now, nor has there ever been, any shame in lawful marriage and procreation (Heb. 13:4).

Home for the young James was in the tiny Galilean village of Nazareth (Matt. 2:23). His father was a carpenter (Matt. 13:55). It was the custom of that age for a son to learn his father's trade and assist in his work. No doubt our subject did just that. A contemporary Jewish proverb said, "He that does not teach his son a trade, trains him to be a thief." Their home would have been an humble one with few of the luxuries of the big city. Their poverty is reflected in Mary's sacrifice of the poor at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:22-24).

The family of James was devout according to the Law. There would have been daily prayer and instruction, a holy atmosphere and environment. Weekly attendance and participation at the local synagogue were part of their family regimen. It is likely he publicly read the Scriptures as did his elder brother (Luke 4:16). As young James grew older, he would

have joined his parents on their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-43).

James was blest with an honorable name—it being a variation of the venerable Hebrew name, Jacob, which meant “the supplanter.”

For some 25 years James sat at the same table, worked in the same shop, slept 'neath the same roof, and worshipped in the same synagogue with the Son of God. The tragedy was he did not even realize the privilege that was his. Neither he nor his brothers appreciated the greatness of their brother, nor did they believe on Him till after His resurrection. In fact, they even ridiculed Him on one occasion (John 7:1-9). Most of His neighbors in Nazareth reacted similarly. Following a sermon the young prophet delivered in His home synagogue, some of them sought to kill Him (Luke 4:16-30). His friends thought Jesus was “beside himself” and needed restraints (Mark 3:21). Likely, James found Jesus’ conduct shocking, revolutionary, and at times revolting to his Jewish upbringing. Jesus associated with publicans and harlots, which no self-respecting Jew would do—much less a rabbi. He was in perpetual warfare with the scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of Judaism. His teachings flew in the face of the traditions of other great rabbis. It is possible that he may have felt that his elder brother died a useless death brought upon Himself by His own misguided zeal.

James, The Leader of the Jerusalem Church

Following the ascension of Christ, we read that Jesus’ *brethren* were meeting with the disciples in the upper room (Acts 1:14). What would account for this sudden change? Paul tells us that the resurrected Christ appeared to James (I Cor. 15:7). We can imagine the shame he felt when he realized that he had spurned the Son of God. No doubt his joy at seeing his beloved brother alive was overwhelming. From that day forth, James never turned back from following Jesus.

James soon became a “pillar” in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9). In Galatians 1:18, 19, Paul calls him an “apostle.” Paul uses that term more broadly than other sacred writers (see Acts 14:14). At the great Jerusalem conference, James

spoke for the other apostles and elders of the church (Acts 15:13-22). Later, he was privileged to write the epistle that bears his name. When the other apostles left to take the gospel to distant lands, James stayed behind to shepherd the flock in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-19). He liked to describe himself as a “servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jas. 1:1).

Prayer was an important part of James’ life. He wrote that “the supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working” and urged his fellow Christians to “pray one for another” (Jas. 5:16). Hegesippus, an early Christian, wrote of James, “His knees were calloused like a camel’s in consequence of his continual kneeling in prayer to God and beseeching pardon for the people.” Because of his great piety, the early disciples called him James the Just. He served the church in Jerusalem some 15 years before his untimely death.

The troublesome Judaizing disciples claimed James as their mentor as they went out seeking to bind Jewish traditions on the Gentile converts (Gal. 2:11-12). They “taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1, 2). James proved himself to be above their narrow, hateful brand of legalistic religion. He actively sought to buffer their hostile opposition to Paul’s work (Acts 21:18-25). In so doing, James helped to save the church from an early death at the hands of those misguided zealots.

James the Martyr

Violent death came to James in 62 A.D. Josephus gives us the details in his *Antiquities*. When Festus the Roman governor died, the Jewish high priest Annas, son of the Annas who tried our Lord, “brought before this court James, the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ, and some of the other men, accusing them of breaking the law, he handed them over to be stoned to death.” Hegesippus reports that they first cast him off the pinnacle of the temple and then stoned him, finally dispatching him with a fuller’s club. So ended the earthly life of this saintly pillar of the Lord’s church.

Lessons to Remember

Growing up with Jesus, James took Him for granted. He could not appreciate his brother's greatness. In the words of the old saw, familiarity bred contempt. Similarly, Alexander Campbell's little congregation at Bethany never realized what a great preacher was in their midst. May God open our eyes to appreciate the value of those close to us.

Let us live our lives so that our neighbors will think of us as "just ones."

We must learn to value prayer as did James.

Whether we come to believe in Christ early or late in life, let us be faithful unto death, as was James.

May each of us grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ so we, too, may be pillars in God's church.

Do not give up hope for those like James who take a long time in reaching a point of saving faith. What if the Lord had given up on him? What a loss it would have been!

Questions

1. Name the brothers of Jesus (Mark 2:3).
2. What do we know about James' early home life?
3. How did James and the brothers react toward Jesus during His earthly ministry?
4. What would account for James' move from unbelief to belief?
5. How did Paul describe James' position in the Jerusalem church?
6. What was James renowned for among the early Christians?
7. Why did they call him James the Just?
8. What role did James play in the controversy between Paul and the Judaizing disciples?
9. What do we know of his death?
10. Discuss the lesson from James that impressed you most.

Simon

The Zealot

We marvel at the strange combination of men Christ chose to lead His church. Perhaps He wished to foreshadow the general character of the church for the ages to come. The apostles portray the divergent gifts, temperaments, classes, and conditions; the strengths and weaknesses of the church throughout the ages. Simon the Zealot is surely one of the most unusual of the twelve.

About the Man

Simon is a man without a history. While none of his personal deeds or sermons are recorded, we can piece together a composite story about this man who served Christ so well.

Simon Was A Zealot

His name, "the Zealot," meant "the zealous one." It was a title for members of a radical Jewish political party. The zealots were a quasi-political, paramilitary group of Jewish nationalists. They were founded by Judas of Gamalas, called the Galilean, in 7 A.D. They originated in reaction to a Roman census taken for the purpose of taxation. Zealots looked to the patriot Mattathias, father of the Maccabees, for their inspiration. He had challenged the Hebrews of his day to resist the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes, with these words: "Now, my children, be zealous for the Law, and give your lives for the covenant of your fathers" (I Maccabees 2:50). The original zealots separated from the Pharisees, believing they were too tolerant of Gentile intrusions.

Beliefs of the Zealots

Judas of Galilee taught, "No God but Jehovah; no tax but to the temple; no friend but a Zealot." They especially hated Rome's dominion over Palestine and were pledged to over-

throw it at any price. Zealots were men of great fervor and fanatical devotion to their cause. They were eager and hot-blooded and burned with a consuming passion for their goals. They despised reasonable men who appealed to Rome for redress, who worked at their jobs, stayed at home with their families, and paid their taxes. The typical Pharisee had for his motto, "Love work, keep apart from politics, having nothing to do with office." To a Zealot this was weakness. Josephus wrote of them, ". . . they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is their only Ruler and Lord. They do not mind dying any kind of death, nor do they heed the torture of their kindred and their friends . . ."

Their Activities

Zealots were extremists and fanatics of the most rabid type who did not hesitate to resort to violence and murder to gain their objectives. Josephus described them as ". . . rather extravagant and reckless in the worst actions." They were called *Sicarii*, i.e., the assassins. They were notorious for attacking their unsuspecting enemies with their short, curved knives. These fanatics killed not only Romans but any Jew who showed sympathy toward them or even hinted at compromise. For years they waged a guerilla war of terrorism until it finally provoked the Roman conflagration of A.D. 68-70 which destroyed and scattered their broken nation. The Zealots' last battle was fought at the desert fortress of Masada, where 960 perished in mass suicide.

It is likely that Barabbas, who was released instead of Jesus, was a fellow Zealot. We are told that he was guilty of murder and insurrection (Mark 15:7).

Simon Became a Disciple of Jesus

We have no way of knowing what drew Simon to the Master and away from his violent comrades. He was among the multitude that followed Him from Galilee (Matt. 4:23-25). Because of his faith and loyalty, Jesus selected him to be one of His apostles (Matt. 10:1-4). With the twelve, he was sent to preach to his fellow Hebrews "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (10:5, 6). They were promised divine guidance by the

Holy Spirit (10:16-20). Jesus' charge stirred a responsive note in Simon's heart. They were to fear no man, even if it meant death (10:28). His Lord had not come "to send peace, but a sword." "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me . . ." (10:34-38). Christ did not destroy Simon's zeal, rather He redirected it. He cleared his vision and clarified his goals. Think of the risk Christ ran in choosing such a radical, revolutionary character for a key helper. Could he be kept under control? Could he be depended on? What would people say? What would the authorities think?

The Lord's apostolic band presents a marvel in human relations. There was Matthew, the tax collector for the Romans, and there was Simon the Zealot. Had they met under any other circumstances, Simon would probably have put his knife in Matthew! Rather, they present a beautiful example of personal enmity destroyed by Christ. If these two natural enemies could be brothers united in a common cause, there is no reason others cannot do the same.

Simon's faith failed him when the soldiers arrested Jesus. "They all left him and fled" (Mark 14:50). But he later recovered and was there in his place when Jesus gave the great commission (Mark 16:14, 15). He stood up with Peter and preached Christ on Pentecost (Acts 2:14). Simon's cause changed, but not his zealous nature. Even as an apostle of the Prince of Peace, a new and transformed man, Simon was still called "the Zealot." Not a single word he said nor a single thing he did was recorded, yet his name is known and honored by millions.

His Missionary Career

Mark tells us that "they [the apostles] went forth and preached everywhere . . ." (16:20). Legend tells us that Simon evangelized in Egypt, Carthage in North Africa, Spain, and Britain. Later, he traveled in Syria and Mesopotamia. His last work was in Persia where he was martyred.

Lessons to Remember

Jesus did not join the Zealots, but He did call the Zealots and all men to follow Him.

Christ was willing to run risks with people like Simon—are we?

No type of mind or character is excluded from Christ's kingdom. We must not seek to build a congregation of spiritual look-alikes.

Christ and His church need men of zeal, but not zealots. A zealot is an intellectual dwarf, unable to see truth in all its relationships. His rationality is consumed by his zeal. The worst feature of a zealot is that he believes God is behind all his actions and that God inspires and approves all he does. Zealots have done the church untold harm. Nothing great or good was ever accomplished without zeal. Jesus gave Himself for a people zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). His church needs zealous disciples, willing to die for the faith. She languishes with impotent, nerveless leaders.

In the Zealot's fiery fiasco at Jerusalem, we see the evil of a rigid patriotism that loved only those who thought, felt, and acted like themselves.

Simon had to learn some hard lessons in becoming Christ's disciple. The Lord's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Peacemakers, not warmongers, are blest of God (Matt. 5:9). He had to learn to love and pray for his enemies, rather than destroy them (Matt. 5:44). He learned that they that take the sword shall perish with the sword (Matt. 26:52). He learned to render unto Caesar the things of Caesar (Mark 2:17).

At the feet of Jesus, the Zealot and the publican can join hands in brotherhood.

Simon abandoned his dagger for the sword of the Spirit. May we abandon our sins and take up our cross and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24).

Questions

1. What do we know about the Jewish *Zealots* party?
2. What was the credo of the *Zealots*?
3. How did Josephus describe the *Zealots*?

4. How did they try to impose their will on their society?
5. What was the end of the Zealots?
6. What lessons about Christ's program can be learned by observing Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot together as apostles?
7. What do we know about Simon's career as an apostle?
8. That Christ would select a man of Simon's background teaches us a lesson. Discuss that lesson.
9. Discuss what is wrong with being a zealot in religion.
10. What are some of the hard lessons Simon had to learn?

Barabbas

The Notable Sinner

When Jesus stood trial before Pilate, the Roman governor was faced with a tough choice. He knew that Christ was innocent of the charges made against Him and wanted to free Him. Yet he hoped to pacify the angry mob and avoid a possible riot. Pilate thought he had discovered an escape route: make them choose between Jesus and one so terribly bad that Jesus would go free.

Now at the feast the governor was wont to release unto the multitude one prisoner, called Barabbas. When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? . . . and they said, Barabbas. (Matt. 27:15-21).

Pilate was shocked and shaken. His plan was smashed; his will broken. The cut-throat was released, and Jesus led away to be crucified.

Christ died in the place of Barabbas that day, but He died in our place as well (Rom. 5:6, 8), and therein is a striking analogy.

About the Man

Barabbas was distinguished by his sin. Matthew says he was a "notable prisoner" (27:16). He "had made insurrection" and "had committed murder" (Mark 15:7). In addition he "was a robber" (John 18:40). Nothing good about the man has been recorded in history, either sacred or profane. His life was noted for its sin, and so have been many others. What has been the most notable fact about your life?

Barabbas was lost. He was a criminal, under arrest, condemned to die! More than that, he was eternally lost because of his sins. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The man was lost because he did not believe on Jesus and accept the salva-

tion offered. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that *believeth not* is condemned already because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

Barabbas stood only a few feet from Jesus, yet he was lost and likely will forever be (we have no record of his ever turning to the Savior). You may at this moment be only inches, seconds, or thoughts away from the Lord's salvation and yet be just as lost as was this criminal.

History records the story of a Greek soldier who helped to pillage the Persian treasure city of Persopolis. Finding a leather bag of jewels, he threw the jewels aside and kept the bag for a bread sack. So some folks spend a lifetime in the worship assembly hearing great sermons and singing spiritual songs, in a home with Christians and a Bible and yet die lost like Barabbas.

Barabbas enjoyed no love or respect from his fellow man. He was a violent criminal, a rebel, and a troublemaker. He was an outcast sentenced to die. Sinners of the world have little affection for their own. Sinners are selfish. They drop a man when his value to them is gone.

But though Barabbas was unloved by men, the God who had formed him in his mother's womb, yet loved his soul. In fact, God so loved Barabbas that He gave His only begotten Son, that if Barabbas believed on Him he would not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." What joy and consolation it is to know that even those vile as Baraboas, the notable sinner, are the objects of His love; that they can be saved. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (I John 4:10-11).

No doubt, Barabbas had heard the chief philosophies of men about salvation: "live right," "be sincere," "do the best you can." He had not even lived up to those human standards nor have most of us. Like us, he had miserably fallen short of God's glorious standard (Rom. 3:23). "All our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6). The ways that seem

right to us are the ways of death (Prov. 16:25). It is by grace that we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves, "not of works, that no man should glory" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Barabbas might have been saved! Of all the people in Jerusalem, Barabbas had the best opportunity to understand the atonement of Christ; *i.e.*, the death of an innocent man for the guilty. He could have accompanied John and the women to the cross. But the door of history slams shut without further mention of the poor wretch's name. Barabbas lived his life for the flesh. He wasted a lifetime on the unimportant. What are you majoring on in your life? May it be the noble task of seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

As our minds flash back to that dark day in history, we see Pilate nod. The guards unlock the chains; they clang to the pavement. Cowing, the freed brigand dashes into the milling crowd. The condemned criminal goes free. The Savior is beaten; the rough cross is thrust upon His shoulders; He is led away to Golgotha.

You, my sinner friend, stand in Barabbas' shoes. What will you do? Will you flee with him and hide your guilt and shame, or will you fall down before the feet of your Savior and worship Him, confessing His name? The decision is yours. The consequences are eternal!

Questions

1. What do we know about Barabbas' previous life?
2. Barabbas was condemned by man's law for his crimes; why was he spiritually condemned?
3. How would Barabbas' peers have thought of him?
4. What was God's attitude toward a sinner like Barabbas?
5. Discuss the "chief philosophies of men about salvation" which we still hear.
6. Since we are much better morally than Barabbas, should we expect to automatically be saved because of that?

7. How could such a vile sinner hope to be saved in view of all the evil he had done?
8. What does history tell us Barabbas' life was like after seeing Jesus?
9. What did Pilate hope to accomplish by demanding that the Jews choose between Christ and Barabbas?
10. What lesson impresses you most about Barabbas?

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" (Matt. 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 been separated and alone in Jewish society. Any social fellowship would have been with other of the conquering Romans. A Gentile pagan, she was in the words of Paul, "without God and without hope" (Eph. 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 considerable more information about her 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 upon 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 violence, 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 (Gen. 30:5-11). Pharaoh's servants saw their future revealed in dreams (Gen. 38:5-13). Pharaoh dreamed of a coming famine (Gen. 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 (Dan. 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 (Heb. 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 . . ." (Eccles. 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" (Jer. 23:28).

That which we risk or sacrifice for Christ, He will repay a hundredfold (Matt. 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 do we know about this woman's life?
2. What do we know about her husband, Pontius Pilate's, earlier life?
3. What was her relationship with God as a Gentile pagan?
4. How did Philo describe Pilate's administration?
5. What do we know about Pilate after Jesus' death?
6. Does God still speak to us through our dreams? Discuss this.

7. This lady's action suggests four worthy things about her name. Discuss them.
8. How might she have learned about the "righteous man" Jesus?
9. Discuss rising above our background to serve God.
10. What lessons in this study impressed you most?

Simon of Cyrene

As the Roman soldiers marched our Lord through the streets of Jerusalem on the way to Calvary, He gave way beneath the weight of the cross. The troops laid hold on a stranger in the crowd, forcing him to bear the Lord's burden (Mark 15:21). This unexpected event emblazoned the name of Simon of Cyrene on the pages of Christian history. Until Christ comes again, Simon will be remembered.

About the Man

His name meant "hearing." It was a popular name among the Jews. He hailed from Cyrene, a city in northern Africa. It was situated between Carthage and Egypt, 800-900 miles from Jerusalem. Modern Tripoli of Libya occupies the site of ancient Cyrene. At the time, northern Africa was a prime agricultural region. The native Libyans were Hametic people, descended from Noah's son, Ham, through Put (Gen. 10:6). Josephus identifies Put as the father of the Libyans (Antiquities 6:2). Large numbers of Jews and Phoenicians lived in Cyrene.

Having traveled so far to be at Jerusalem for the Passover season, Simon almost certainly would have been a Jewish adherent. He may have been a Jew of the Dispersion, living in a Gentile land. Many Hebrews had been scattered over the Mediterranean world because of business, slavery or war. He could have been a Gentile proselyte to the religion of Moses. There were thousands of them in those days (Matt. 23:15).

Simon had two sons, Rufus and Alexander (Mark 15:21). Since it is universally conceded that Mark wrote his gospel for the Roman saints, they must have known Simon and his sons by name. Paul later sent greetings to a Roman brother named Rufus (Rom. 16:13). The apostle spoke of Rufus' mother as his own in that same verse. It is quite possible that this was the widow of Simon, who had extended personal care and hospitality to Paul.

His Shocking Experience

Simon had journeyed some 900 hard and dangerous miles for the sacred festival. No doubt he had conducted himself with care so as not to be ceremonially defiled and thus disqualified for worship (Lev. 15:31). As he entered the holy city that morning, he was confronted by the clamor of the crucifixion party making its way through the streets. Doubtless, he watched with curiosity as the mob passed by. It is not likely that he would have known who Jesus was at that point. He was just another victim of the Roman overlords. Suddenly, Simon found himself conscripted for a job no Jew wanted: to carry a condemned man's cross. The cross bore a curse to the Jew: "for he that is hanged [on a tree] is accursed of God . . ." (Deut. 21:22, 23). Such a task was defiling to him, leaving him unable to eat the sacred passover feast. Of course, the Romans cared little for such religious scruples. They had the authority to make such demands of all conquered people and used it (Matt. 5:41). At the time, the experience would have seemed the most unfortunate and disgusting thing that could happen to him. It was a hindrance, an interruption, a humiliation. Little did he realize the significance of his deed. No doubt, he bore his burden all the way to Golgotha and witnessed the awful events of the crucifixion and death of Christ.

The Impact on Simon's Life

He had come to Jerusalem a disciple of Moses. He returned almost certainly a disciple of Jesus. His wife and sons seem to have followed his example, imitating the Christ (I Cor. 11:1). Men from Cyrene heard the gospel preached fifty days later on Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Simon could well have been in their midst.

Some think that we find Simon later as a leader of the church in Antioch (Acts 12:1, 2). The name Symeon mentioned there is the same as our Simon. Symeon was called Niger. Niger refers to the great land and river of Africa and means "black." Symeon called Niger (the black man) is grouped with Lucius of Cyrene. Both men being from Africa could have been from the same city—Cyrene. If this be our Simon, then he would have been a proselyte to Judaism. It would also explain

how Paul had become friends with Simon's family when he worked at Antioch.

Some Lessons to Remember

If Simon was a black man, it is significant that Europeans, Asians, and Africans were all present when Christ died for all.

In this episode we are forcefully reminded of the humanity of Jesus and the great physical and mental suffering He endured for us. "Behooved it not the Christ to suffer all these things?," wrote Luke (24:26).

We see the great offense of the cross. Christ was humiliated by a criminal's death. "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away" (Acts 8:33). He "endured the cross, despising the shame" to save the world (Heb. 12:2). The Jews had no place in their thinking for a suffering, dying Messiah. The word of the cross to them was foolishness (I Cor. 1:18). To them the man was cursed who died upon a tree (Deut. 21:23).

Simon bore Christ's cross that day, but Christ endured the cross for Simon and us as well.

Each of us has a cross to carry for the Master, even as Simon did. We must take up our cross, following Jesus daily (Matt. 16:28). To refuse to bear our cross makes us unworthy disciples (Matt. 10:38). That cross is the suffering and indignities we bear because we are Christians (Heb. 11:25, 26). Bearing other folks' burdens is an integral part of Christianity (Gal. 6:2). Christianity demands more than observation; there must be involvement.

What to Simon was a painful, disgraceful thing was later cherished as an honor and joy. He helped the Son of God carry His burden. His deeds that day wrote his name in the pages of human history. Wherever the gospel has gone, Simon's name is honored.

Some folks have honor thrust upon them with no desire or effort to obtain it on their part. They may even feel the experience to be a burden rather than a blessing at the time. Yet it may turn out as did Simon's experience that day. We never know what great things come from what appears to be a meaningless or irritating event. We should always be anxious to do good to all men as opportunities arise (Gal. 6:10).

Conclusion: Today Christ Himself, not a Roman soldier, calls upon you to take up your cross and follow Him (Matt. 16:24). Unlike Simon, you are given a choice to do so or not. Your decision, however, will have eternal consequences for your soul.

Questions

1. Where was Cyrene located?
2. How far had Simon journeyed to be there for the Pass-over?
3. Discuss the possibilities of Simon's religious faith.
4. Why would no Jew want to carry a condemned man's cross?
5. What impact did his painful experience have on Simon's after-life?
6. Discuss the likelihood of Simon being at Antioch at a later date?
7. What does the crucifixion story remind us of concerning Jesus?
8. What is the "offense of the cross"?
9. In view of Matthew 16:28 what is the cross you must carry?
10. Discuss the idea that what seems at the moment to be a disgraceful thing may later be cherished as an honor.

Ananias and Sapphira

Partners In Deceit

Satan never grants the church rest until he has it under his evil power. Even when the apostles were yet upon the earth, he sought to subvert, corrupt, and destroy Christ's people. A notable example is that of Ananias and Sapphira, a couple who sought to deceive their brethren and incurred the wrath of Jehovah (Acts 5:1-16). "They sold a possession, and kept back part of the price . . . and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet . . ."

About Our Subjects

Ananias and Sapphira were members of the Jerusalem congregation. This tells us that they had heard and obeyed the gospel in becoming Christians, even as we did. Since Pentecost, all who hear the gospel, believe, and are baptized are saved and added to the church (Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:47). They were "church-going" people. Thus they enjoyed the *respectability* that goes with being disciples of Jesus. These folks were privileged to hear some of the world's greatest gospel preaching as a member of the Jerusalem church. They had witnessed the miracles and signs wrought through the apostles by the Holy Spirit. The fact that they had land to sell tells us they were rich, for only the wealthy were landowners in this age. Their names seem terribly inappropriate. Ananias (Hanaiah) meant "to whom Jehovah has been gracious." Sapphira (from Sapphire) meant "Beautiful."

Background of Their Sin

In their zeal and dedication, many of the Jerusalem saints sold their property and gave the proceeds to the Lord for the benefit of the poor (Acts 4:32-36). Doubtless, praise and recognition were given to those generous saints such as that given to Barnabas by Luke (Acts 4:36, 37). Our subjects evidently craved this attention for themselves but lacked the liberal spirit of others.

Their Awful Sin and Judgment

From the sacred record we see a number of sins which combined to form the rope which hung them. There was *deceit* in their plotting and pretense before the apostles. There was *hypocrisy* in pretending to be what they were not. We see their *false pride* in seeking the praise of men. *Avarice* is evident in their unhealthy desire for and attachment to money. Their *conception of God was faulty* in that they believed they could succeed in such a trick. They were guilty of *sacrilege* in lying while engaged in an act of worship to God. They *despised the Holy Spirit* in lying to him (Acts 5:3). They had not *resisted Satan's temptation* when the first thought of deception came to mind.

Why Such Severe Punishment?

Luke reports that when Ananias heard Peter's rebuke, he "fell down and gave up the ghost" (Acts 5:5). The same drastic sentence fell upon his conspiring mate. It is not uncommon for students to ask why God dealt so harshly with this couple. Paul tells us that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Thus they got what they earned. It was a just action on God's part. It was important that an evil practice be nipped in the bud. If their bid for glory had gone unchecked, then other weak brethren may have been tempted to try the same. A little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump (I Cor. 5:6). It was a necessary act in order to counteract the adverse effects such a lie would have on those without the church. A hostile community was eager to find some flaw in the conduct of the disciples. Such hypocrisy would have been paraded as typical of all their good deeds. God did what had to be done to protect His infant church from serious harm.

The Effects of the Judgment

As the word spread through the congregation and community, "great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things" (Acts 5:11). Each brother and sister was made keenly aware of the need for honesty, truthfulness, and sincerity (Phil. 4:8). They saw the awful fruit of hypocrisy and deceitfulness (Rom. 1:28-32). No doubt a sifting occurred

wherein the insincere and unconverted distanced themselves from the brethren, while the righteous feared God with reverential awe (Heb. 12:28, 29). Sinners with unholy motives dared not seek membership where such judgments prevailed (Acts 5:13). In the next paragraph the author informs us that "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14). The results were like the sunshine after the rainstorm.

Why Preserve This Unpleasant Story?

No one doubts that this was a true historical event in the life of the young church. If we were to have a correct, balanced picture of those early days, we needed the bad news as well as the good. It is helpful for us today to know that there have been rascals in the church from the beginning. This should keep us from being too discouraged when we discover their modern day counterparts in our midst. The death of Ananias and Sapphira forever sounds a warning against the evil sins of greed, hypocrisy, and lying. The story in its completeness contains sunrays of hope that the church can survive the failures of her members. More importantly, it reminds us of the need for discipline in every congregation. The first church learned directly from God that flagrant sin could not be tolerated. So, today, we must "mark them that cause divisions and occasions of stumbling . . . and turn away from them" (Rom. 16:17). We must withdraw ourselves from every brother that walks disorderly (II Thess. 3:6). Few commandments are as universally ignored as is this one. We do so to our own hurt and undoing.

Lessons to Remember

Remember that "lying lips are an abomination to Jehovah, but they that deal truly are his delight" (Prov. 12:22). Now, as then, "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" (I Tim. 6:10). Ananias and Sapphira were not compelled to give all their wealth to God, but they were expected to tell the truth. We cannot trifle with truth and escape unpunished. Our sin will find us out (Num. 32:23). Sapphira learned that helpers in

sin must be sharers in judgment. Nothing will shake the confidence of friends more than a lie found out. Nothing shatters one's own self-respect as a lie whether one is exposed or not.

May all of God's children speak the truth and lie not (I Tim. 2:7).

Questions

1. What was the sinful thing this couple did?
2. What can we know about their religious life and experience up to this time?
3. What do you think prompted them to do this sinful deed?
4. Discuss the eight different sins involved in their action.
5. Why did God deal so severely with this couple?
6. What was the effect of their punishment on the church and community?
7. Why would such an unpleasant story be preserved for us?
8. What arrangement has God made for us to deal with flagrant sin in the congregation?
9. Discuss in what sense "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (I Tim. 6:10).
10. What lesson most impresses you in this study?

Philip

The Soul-Winning Deacon

A church's strength is in its leadership. God ordained that each congregation have elders and deacons (Phil. 1:1). Among the deacons chosen to serve the Jerusalem church was a man named Philip (Acts 6:1-6). Every man who would serve as a deacon would profit by a study of Philip's life and work.

About the Man

His name, Philip, meant "lover of horses." It was a Grecian name. This fact has led many to conclude that Philip was a Hellenistic Jew, *i.e.*, one born and raised outside of Palestine.

We can know something of his personal and spiritual attributes. Those chosen to serve as deacons had to meet certain qualifications. They had to be "of good report," "full of the Holy Spirit," and "wise." Later to Timothy, Paul gave more details of deacons' qualifications. These Philip, no doubt, met. "Deacons in like manner must be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. . . . Let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well" (Prov. 3:8-12).

In Acts 21:7-10 we learn a few details about Philip's family. He later lived at Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea coast. He was blest with four daughters who were yet virgins. This gives us a glimpse of the good moral training and environment his home provided. Such training is desperately needed today (Prov. 22:6).

Philip's daughters "*prophesied.*" A prophet was an inspired teacher (I Cor. 12:10). Prophets spoke words of "edification, and exhortation, and consolation" (I Cor. 14:3). Women who prophesied were not allowed to exercise their gift in the presence of men (I Tim. 2:12). Therefore, they were not privileged

to preach in the public assembly of the church (I Cor. 14:33, 34). These restrictions imposed by Paul were "the commandment of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37), not just the opinions of the bachelor apostle, as some claim. Not being authorized to exercise their gift in the presence of men, these daughters must have used it to teach women and children. Thus, Paul instructs older women to teach younger women (Titus 2:3, 4).

Philip's home was a haven of *hospitality*, for Paul and his companions found a place of welcomed rest there (Acts 21:8). For a man's home to be hospitable, his wife must be cooperative in the matter. It should be that all saints are "given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13). In fact, a man who is inhospitable cannot serve as an elder in God's kingdom (I Tim. 3:2). One should not feel pressured to open his home to others. As Peter says, we should use "hospitality without murmuring" (I Pet. 4:9). The rewards to the hospitable are many. Alluding to Abraham's experience at Mamre, the Hebrews writer says, "Forget not to show love unto strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2). The ultimate reward will be when Jesus acknowledges your kindness in judgment, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you . . . for I was hungry and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in . . ." (Matt. 25:34, 35).

His Work As A Deacon

The Apostles instructed the Jerusalem church to seek out the seven men to serve as deacons, saying, "It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God, and serve tables" (Acts 6:2). These were poor folks whose case needed attention. Philip and his co-workers were to meet these needs, thus allowing the apostles to get on with their work of teaching. So, today, in every congregation, there are numerous jobs that need to be done. Elders who oversee the flock in all matters must concentrate primarily on "watching in behalf of souls" (Heb. 13:17). The preacher's fundamental job is that of preaching the Word and the work that makes that possible (II Tim. 4:2; I Tim. 4:13-16). Deacons serve the Lord and the congregation by relieving their elders and preacher of these temporal jobs. Happy is that congregation whose deacons understand and accept their responsibilities.

The Soul-Winner

Sometime after his appointment as a deacon, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ." "And the multitudes gave heed with one accord unto the things that were spoken by Philip" (Acts 8:5, 6). "But when they believe Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Philip never passed up an opportunity to share his faith. He was not prejudiced toward Samaritans as most Jews were. He brought "much joy in that city" (Acts 8:8).

Later Philip was privileged to teach a nobleman from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-39). He was willing to "hit the road" for God. He had time for one man. Wealth and power did not intimidate Philip. There was no hesitation on his part to teach a man from Africa. "And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35). Upon the Ethiopian's confession, Philip baptized him into Christ (Acts 8:38).

Lessons to Remember

Every congregation has an ongoing need for dedicated deacons to assist their elders and preacher in God's work.

All Christian homes should be havens of hospitality as was Philip's.

May we so rear our children that they, like Philip's daughters, will be active in serving the Lord.

Each man who accepts the deacon's post should be a soul-winner like Philip was.

Let all Christians be ever on the lookout for folks like the Samaritans and Ethiopians to whom we may preach Jesus.

Questions

1. Discuss the idea that “a church’s strength is in its leadership.”
2. Being a deacon, what can we know of Philip’s character and life?
3. What do we know of his family and home life?
4. What instructions are placed on Christian women who teach the Bible?
5. Discuss the importance of hospitality in the Christian life.
6. What is the main difference in the work of elders and deacons in the church?
7. What was unique about Philip’s going into Samaria?
8. What did he teach the Samaritans to do to be saved?
9. What does Philip’s work with the Samaritans and the Ethiopian teach us about a deacon’s work?
10. In your estimate, what is the notable lesson in this study?

Ananias

The Damascene

Seldom can we estimate the full and long-term consequences of any deed in our lives, be it good or evil. Could Ananias, the humble disciple of Damascus, possibly have foreseen the real value of his deed that day when he immersed the penitent Saul of Tarsus into Christ (Acts 9:10-20)?

Ananias is one of that great host of forgotten heroes of the early church. Yet we are deeply indebted to him for his part in teaching and baptizing the most illustrious spiritual brother we ever had.

About the Man

The name Ananias means “gracious is Jehovah.” It is the Grecian form of the Hebrew Hananiah. His character was excellent. He was “well reported of by all the Jews,” being “a devout man according to the law” (Acts 22:12). More importantly he was a faithful disciple of Jesus, else he would not have been given so important a task. The Lord spoke to him in a vision commissioning him to go to the penitent Saul (Acts 9:10-13); thus, he was on speaking terms with the Lord. Moreover, he was a willing servant and messenger of the Master. When called, he responded, “Behold, I am here, Lord.” He was ready to do God’s will (Acts 9:10). He was a sympathetic soul-winner, willing to go even to a man whose hands were stained with Christian blood.

His home town was Damascus, the oldest continually inhabited city of our earth. It was there back in Abraham’s day (Gen. 15:2). It was a lovely city, built of white stone, situated in a lush green valley bounded by mountains and deserts. Damascus was described by contemporaries as “the pearl of the Orient;” beautiful as Eden, fragrant as paradise. Some called it “the eye of the east.”

The street called Straight, where the blinded Saul waited, was a great boulevard running east and west through the city. It had three lanes; a wide center lane for traffic with two broad walks on either side for merchants and the throngs of pedestrians and shoppers.

Ananias was an humble man, holding no high station in life. He wrote no Scripture nor books that we know of. There is no record of any great sermons he preached like that of Peter on Pentecost. We read nothing of him traveling to great cities or preaching in distant lands, as did some. No mention is made of his preaching to kings or scholars. Save for this one incident, the career of Ananias is lost in obscurity. His one claim to fame is that he taught and baptized the greatest preacher, theologian and writer, the greatest traveler and missionary since Christ!

His Commission

His *commission* is recorded in Acts 9:11-16, "and the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul . . ." Although he was ready to serve his Lord at call, Ananias was not aware of the danger of this mission. "I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to the saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name" (Acts 9:13). But God assured him that things had now changed. The lion had been tamed. The Greek has God say in the present tense, "just be going" (Acts 9:15). With the Lord's assurance, Ananias went to the smitten enemy. This is the essence of true faith—to obey the Lord regardless of the personal risk or cost.

The Miracle He Wrought

Ananias entered the house, laid his hands upon Saul, and said, "Brother Saul, receive thy sight" (Acts 22:13). "And straightway there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight . . ." (Acts 9:18). When we compare this with the deeds of modern "miracle workers" the differences are striking. The cure was "*straightway*" or immediate. There was no time lapse at all as in most modern cases. *No gift was*

solicited, as is common in contemporary faith healings. Ananias did not preach on the glory of healing and miracles as is done by modern day counterfeit healers. The reason the particulars were so different is that his was a genuine miracle from God—those of our day are but a delusion for the credulous. The miracle of giving Saul his sight confirmed the fact that God had sent Ananias with a message for Paul. This divine confirmation was the primary purpose for all apostolic miracles (Mark 16:19, 20). Never were miracles done in the gaudy, promiscuous fashion of the “Pentecostal healing service” of our day. With the completion and confirmation of the perfect new covenant, the age of miracles came to a close (I Cor. 13:8-10).

The Message

He said, “The God of our father hath appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous One. . . . For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men . . . and now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:14-16). First, there was the announcement and confirmation of Saul’s apostolic appointment. But then he urged him to be immersed in baptism. One immediately wonders, where did Ananias learn such a doctrine? Those familiar with the gospel records will see a remarkable relation between his words and the Lord’s final commission: “Go . . . preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15, 16). On the Damascus road the smitten persecutor cried out, “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). The Lord’s reply was, “enter into the city, and it shall be told there what thou must do” (Acts 9:6). Ananias was sent to Saul for the express purpose of telling him what to do to be saved. His message is yet valid today. It is heaven’s message to all alien sinners.

The Unexpected Results

The penitent believer was born of water and Spirit that very day (Acts 9:18; John 3:3-5). In Christ that day, Saul and Ananias met as brothers. The wolf and the lamb lay peaceably side by side (Isaiah 11:6). He was no ordinary convert. Immediately, the persecutor became a proclaimer. “Straightway

in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus . . .” (Acts 9:19, 20). He that had wasted the church now became its chief builder. Rather than write accusations against the saints, he wrote Scripture to them.

Lessons to Remember

Each time we teach a sinner the gospel, we may well capture another Saul for our Savior. Don't despair if you are not a great orator or promoter. Be like Ananias and bring a Paul into the kingdom. We need to have the obedient spirit seen in Ananias (Heb. 5:8, 9). Let us teach that same gospel that Ananias preached to Saul (Acts 22:10). When confronted with so-called modern miracles, always remember the nature and purpose of the apostolic miracles (Mark 16:19, 20). Ananias blest the man who would have done him much harm. This is the essence of *agape* love; to bless them that persecute us (Matt. 5:43, 44). May God be able to use us as he did Ananias to lead searching souls to salvation. Remember as you go forth to teach the gospel that Christ has promised to go with you always, blessing and helping you in your task (Matt. 28:20).

Questions

1. What one deed wrote Ananias' name in history?
2. What can we learn about this man's life and character?
3. What do we know about ancient Damascus?
4. Why did he hesitate to go to Saul of Tarsus when God instructed him?
5. Discuss some of the differences between the healing of Saul's eyes and the deeds of modern "faith healers."
6. Why did Ananias baptize Saul?
7. How does Saul's case illustrate the meaning of the wolf and lamb lying peaceably together (Isaiah 11:6)?
8. How can the humble brother who is not a great teacher possibly help to build up the Lord's kingdom?
9. What is the essence of *agape* love?
10. What lesson from Ananias most impresses you?

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 Ashtoroth, her devotees worshipped in sexual orgies.

Morally, Corinth was one of the most debauched cities of 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. The very name, Corinthian, was a by-word for reckless, riotous, and immoral living. Aelian, 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 (I Cor. 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 (I Cor. 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 couple named Priscilla and Aquila. Both being tent-makers, Paul abode 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 18:7). We should be reminded that prospective converts are not often found in our church buildings, but in the public places and homes of our communities.

The subject of the apostle's preaching was simple. He testified "that Jesus was the Christ" (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 . . ." (I Cor. 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" (I Cor. 2:1, Jerusalem Bible). Later he wrote, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (I Cor. 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 upon him (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 (I Cor. 15:1, 2). Upon hearing and believing they "were baptized" (Acts 18:8). Their baptism was a burial or immersion in water (Rom. 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 (I Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:18). They were "the church of God . . . at Corinth" (I Cor. 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 (Rom.

16:23). *Erastus*, the city treasurer, was won to Christ (Rom. 16:23), as were *Quartus*, *Fortunatus*, and *Achaicus* (Rom. 16:23; I Cor. 16:17). Paul himself immersed the household of *Stephanas* (I Cor. 1:16), and later saw the family of *Chloe* added (I Cor. 1:11). *Sosthenes*, who at one point sought Paul harm, was later converted (Acts 18:17; I Cor. 1:1).

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, the city?
2. What was the religious environment of Corinth?
3. Morally how would you describe their city?
4. What do we know about the planting of the church in Corinth?
5. What was their church building like?
6. Where did Paul find his first converts in Corinth?
7. Could Paul's example of working in the synagogues be helpful to us today? How?
8. What was the essence of Paul's sermon?
9. Discuss Paul's manner and method of preaching the gospel.
10. What did the Corinthians do to become Christians?

The Aristocratic Athenians

Athens was the most illustrious city of the Mediterranean world. Although she had long since lost her political dominion, she was yet the undisputed center of learning. Art and philosophy, sculpture, literature, and oratory were her glory. She was the cradle of the democratic form of government. Historians have named her one of the three greatest cities of all times.

It appears that Athens was not a planned stop on Paul's missionary itinerary, but rather that he fled there to avoid a violent situation at Berea.

The missionary he was, Paul's "spirit was provoked within him as he beheld the city full of idols" (Acts 17:16). Satan's power and dominion over the city were evident in the moral degradation and corruption of the people. They prostituted themselves and profaned Jehovah by their idolatry.

Bearing the gospel commission as he did, "he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with them that met him" (Acts 17:17).

Soon he was invited to speak in the Areopagus, sometimes called Mar's Hill. This rocky eminence stood in the midst of the city near the Agora or marketplace. On the Areopagus sat the most august court of the day. In the past, they had passed sentence upon the greatest criminals and in Paul's day upon the most solemn questions of philosophy and religion. The judges sat on seats of hewn stone in the open air. Their court was reached by a flight of stairs from the marketplace. Across from Mar's Hill could be seen the Acropolis, crowned by the beautiful temple of Athena, patron of the city.

"And certain also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him" (Acts 17:18). The *Epicureans* were founded by Epicurus, who was born 352 B.C. Their philosophy held that the supreme good in life was pleasure and happiness. Epicurus taught that happiness was to be found in temper-

ance, sobriety, and contentment with little. He argued that the gods have no interest in man and that man has no moral destiny. Epicureans built their philosophy upon the weakness of humanity, and many used it as an excuse to indulge the fleshly appetites.

Stoics followed Zeno of Cyprus who was born 340 B.C. He founded his school in the Stoa or Arcade of Athens. Religiously they were pantheists. They believed the world was God's body and God the world's soul. They taught that man should live in harmony with nature. Stoics saw virtue as the highest goal. They believed man to be the master of his fate and supreme in himself. They practiced indifference toward the world. Stoics built their doctrine upon the pride of man.

It is interesting to note how these worldly philosophers viewed Paul and his message. They called him a "babbler," literally "a seed picker." The imagery is drawn from the noisy sparrows found in the market place. This was obviously a term of contempt. They saw the Lord's apostle as some itinerant peddler of second-hand scraps of wisdom. Such self-proclaimed teachers were common in the great city. They called him "a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18b). Evidently they thought that "Resurrection" was the name of some new god. His doctrines were strange and bizarre to their pagan ears. Paul spoke of *one God*; they had thousands. He set forth the *brotherhood of man*; to them none were equal to the Greeks. They scoffed at the idea of a *bodily resurrection*. They knew nothing of a *day of judgment*. *Repentance* that was godly sorrow for sins against God and a vow for reformation was novel to them. The idea of a Jew judging the whole world to them seemed foolish.

Idle curiosity was a known trait of the Athenians. They "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or hear some new thing," says Luke (Acts 17:21). It was their trademark to want to talk about a proposition rather than act. Four hundred years before, when Philip of Macedon threatened Athens' security, Demosthenes chided them saying, "Is it your sole ambition to wander through public places, each inquiring of the other what new advices?" The Athenians were addicted to mental gymnastics. They adored the goddess of novelty.

Paul's Matchless Sermon (Acts 17:22b, 23)

We are impressed by his courteous introduction. "Ye men of Athens" was a style of address famous among Athens' renowned orators. "I perceive," said he, "that ye are very religious." The Athenians were known as the most religious people in antiquity. Josephus said, "The Athenians are affirmed by all men . . . , to be the most religious of the Greeks." Sophocles wrote, "They say Athens is most pious towards the gods." Pansanias observed that "Athens had more images than all of the rest of Greece put together." Petronius said, "It was easier to find a god at Athens than a man." That Paul was factual in his presentation is confirmed by Lucian who noted that it was forbidden to use complimentary exordia when addressing the Areopagus in hope of securing its goodwill.

He spoke of their "altar to an unknown god." Back in 600 B.C., a great pestilence fell upon Athens. Epimenides the Cretan suggested that a flock of black and white sheep be loosed in the city. Whenever one of them lay down, it was sacrificed to the nearest god. If there was no shrine nearby, it was sacrificed to an unknown god. There were many such altars in the city.

"What therefore ye worship in ignorance, this I set forth unto you" (17:23). For this humble Jew to charge these proud Athenian philosophers with ignorance was hazardous as well as audacious. When Jehovah is unknown to men, it is not that He has hidden Himself in darkness, it is because men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19).

The heart of his sermon began with an affirmation of God's relation to the world (17:24, 25). Being the Creator who made the world, He is Lord of heaven and earth. Being omnipresent, He cannot be confined to temples made with human hands (Psa. 139:7). Paul reasoned that Jehovah is self-sufficient and independent of His creation. The more enlightened of the pagans grasped this truth. Eurypides wrote, "What house built by craftsmen could enclose the form divine within enfolding walls?" God said through David, "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. . . . For the world is mine and the fulness thereof" (Psa. 50:9-12). Paul's

God was the very source of life and blessing to His dependent children.

The apostle spoke of the dignity and destiny of man (17:26-29). He affirmed that all are of one origin and stock: "he made of one every nation of men . . ." Not only are we one in our physical nature, but also spiritually in that all have sinned (Rom. 3:23); all are personally responsible (Rom. 14:12); and all can be saved (II Pet. 3:9). The Athenians viewed themselves as the flower and creme of the human family; all others were intended to be their slaves, according to Aristotle. Paul's words challenged their false notion of superiority.

God, said Paul, determines and guides the destinies of men and nations. Moses wrote that God "set the bounds of the people" (Deut. 32:8). He designed man to seek after his Creator (17:27). In the words of Solomon "he hath set eternity in their heart . . ." (Eccles. 3:11).

Man is totally dependent upon God, "for in him we live, and move, and have our being." Epimenides, the Cretan poet, had earlier written these very words. Man is God's offspring, even as their great poets had taught. Aratus of Tarsus wrote in 270 B.C.: "Never O men, let us leave him unmentioned, all ways are full of Zeus and all meeting places of men; the sea and the harbors are full of him. In every direction we all have to do with Zeus; for we are also his offspring." Having established this point, the apostle then draws his conclusion: If man is God's offspring, then God can in no sense be the creation of man's artistic skills. Is God the father of man? Then He must have a nature resembling that of man; living, rational, responsible, not one of lifeless wood, stone or metal. The pagans drew a faulty conclusion from this truth spoken by their poet. Being God's offspring, they concluded that God had a human body and cast images to reflect that.

Paul presented his doctrine of Christ and His salvation (17:30, 31). In days past God had winked at their ignorance—now a new dispensation had begun. All men, including his hearers, must repent (Luke 13:3). To enforce the importance of that duty, he presented a powerful incentive—a day of judgment for all men when they will answer to God for their lives (II Cor. 5:10). A new judge has been appointed to deal

with men—Jesus Christ, God’s Son (John 5:26, 27). Even these proud judges will be judged. This supreme Judge is fully certified. God raised Him from the dead, declared Him to be His Son with power (Rom. 1:4).

The Athenians found Paul’s doctrine of a resurrection novel. They would have identified with the doctrine reflected by Aeschylus, “Once a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection.”

The Disappointing Results

“Some mocked” in derision. Michaelis writes:

The Greek mind was more irrational than the savage, when religion was philosophized about. He laughed when he heard of the resurrection of the dead, for the doctrine was not a fashionable one; but when he was told that our souls would one day pass into cows, oxen, donkeys . . . , he was less opposed to it, for this idea did not seem so new or strange to him, the Pythagoreans having taught it.

Athens well illustrates Paul’s point in I Corinthians 1:21, “the world in its wisdom knew not God.”

Some of his hearers procrastinated saying, “we will hear thee yet again.” They would defer reaching a conclusion on so momentous a theme. Yet others believed. Luke mentions certain men, among them Dionysius the Areopagite. Eusebius records that he later became an elder (bishop) in the church in Athens. A lady named Damaris believed. We know nothing but the meaning of her name: “heifer.” We marvel that so few were responsive to the grand presentation.

Lessons to Remember

From this grand episode in Paul’s ministry, we learn the following lessons: Human wisdom will not, it cannot, save man from sin’s power and destruction. We note that men can worship sincerely and yet do so in ignorance that negates its value. We are reminded that the intellectual have always had difficulty in accepting the simple gospel. Even great preachers like Paul do not always reap a great harvest. That depends solely upon the quality of the soil of the hearers’ hearts.

Questions

1. What was the status of Athens among the cities of the Mediterranean world?
2. What occasioned Paul's trip to Athens?
3. Why was Paul's spirit provoked while in this notable city?
4. Discuss the possibilities of our preaching in the "market place" today.
5. What was the Areopagus where Paul spoke?
6. What do we know about the Epicureans?
7. What do we know about the Stoics?
8. How did the brilliant philosophers of Athens respond to Paul's message?
9. What do we know about their altar "to an unknown god"?
10. What lesson do we learn about teaching unbelievers from this lesson?
11. What impresses you most about Paul's experiences in Athens?

(The author is indebted to Wm. Barclay's Daily Study Bible on Acts for much of this lesson.)

John Mark

The Man Who Redeemed Himself

Most of us know the bitter taste of failure. We have borne the humiliation of our own stupidity, cowardice, or laziness. We reproach ourselves and wish for another chance to redeem ourselves. Such was the experience of John Mark.

About the Man

His Hebrew name, John, meant “the grace of God.” Marcus, his Latin surname, meant “hammer.” Mark was a popular name among the Romans (Acts 12:12). Jews commonly adopted a Greek or Latin name for us among the Gentiles.

Mark’s mother was a well-to-do disciple named Mary. Her home was a frequent meeting place for the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Since his father is never mentioned in the record, we assume that Mary was widowed. Mark was a cousin of Barnabas, the noted leader of the Jerusalem church and later a great missionary to the Gentiles (Col. 4:10).

Some scholars think that Mary’s home was the site of the upper room where the Lord and His disciples took the last supper and where the disciples met following the resurrection. Their reasoning is based upon information gleaned from Acts 12:23, 24. The home was large enough to accommodate *many* disciples. It had a gate and an inner court. There was at least one household servant. The apostle Peter frequented their home. When released from jail, he immediately went to Mary’s house. Rhoda, the maid, recognized his familiar voice.

It is thought by most that the young man in Gethsemane when Christ was arrested was Mark. Only Mark’s gospel relates that “a certain young man followed with him, having a linen cloth cast about him, over his naked body: and they lay hold on him; but he left the linen cloth and fled naked” (14:51, 52). If Jesus and His band had met for the last meal in his

house, the lad may have followed them out to the garden with only his bed sheet wrapped around him. Only Mark could have known of such an incident since all the other disciples had fled (Mark 14:50).

It is likely that Peter converted Mark. This conclusion is drawn from I Peter 5:13 where the apostle calls "Mark my son." This expression commonly described one's convert (I Cor. 4:15).

When Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus journeyed to Antioch in 45 A.D., Mark was allowed to accompany them (Acts 12:25). Both in Jerusalem and Antioch, the young man was privileged to witness the preaching and sweeping success of the gospel.

The Test He Failed

In 48 A.D. Saul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey. Mark was invited to accompany them as an "attendant" (Acts 13:2-5). Being youthful he did not go as a preacher, but as an assistant or apprentice. We can imagine what a thrilling, exciting adventure that must have been for the young man: the ocean voyage, the new and strange sights and experiences, the adventure of it all.

For some unknown reason, however, John Mark "departed from them [at Perga] and returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13:14). Luke, the sacred historian, assigns no reason for his action. But Paul's later reaction towards Mark proves it to have been unacceptable (Acts 15:36-40).

Several possibilities are set forth for Mark's defection. Perhaps he was fearful of the danger of that wild rugged country of Asia Minor into which they were heading. He may have taken exception to Paul's assuming of the leadership of the mission team which Mark's relative, Barnabas, had begun. Possibly, he did not agree with Paul's emphasis on Gentile evangelism. Then, maybe he was just a homesick boy needing to see his mother. Whatever the case, Paul found Mark's conduct so inexcusable that he refused to allow the youth to go with him again! John Mark had put his hand to the plow and then looked back. To Paul, the words of Christ applied here, such made a man unfit for the kingdom (Luke 9:62). At this early stage of his life, Mark lacked the grace of perseverance. He had no staying quality!

His Second Chance

When a second missionary trip was planned in 51 A.D., Barnabas was ready to give his young relative a chance to redeem himself (Acts 15:36-40). Paul, however, was intractable. To him, Mark's conduct was inexcusable. Paul reasoned that a general cannot build his campaign with unreliable men. Gentle Barnabas argued that a brother deserved a second chance. The contention was sharp. Imagine the emotions Mark must have experienced as the controversy raged about him.

Each man being adamant in his thinking about the young man, the two friends parted company. Paul chose Silas to accompany him on a journey throughout Syria and Cilicia. Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus. So far as we know, the two friends never worked together again.

The Productive Years

Some 11 years of Mark's life are passed by in silence. But in 62 A.D. Paul wrote to the church at Colossae from his Roman prison. Now Mark was with him (Col. 4:10). He was endorsed by Paul in his gospel work. To Philemon, Paul called Mark his "fellow-worker" (Phile. 24). This term is used by the apostle to describe his trusted and proven helpers. Later, as Paul waited the day of his execution, he asked for Mark to come, saying, "for he is useful to me for ministering" (II Tim. 4:11). No man could ask for a greater testimonial than this from the noble apostle Paul. Still later, we find Mark serving in "Babylon" with Peter (I Pet. 5:13).

In about 65 A.D. Mark penned his account of the life of Christ. It seems to have been written especially to appeal to the Roman mind. Justin Martyr called Mark's book "the memoirs of Peter." Papias wrote in 140 A.D. that John used to say [that] Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said or done. . . . He followed Peter . . . and Peter adopted his instruction to practical needs . . ."

Later tradition has Mark traveling and evangelizing in Egypt where he suffered martyrdom.

Lessons to Remember

All of us are like Mark in some way. Most of us have failed miserably at some point in life: we have let down those who trusted us. We have all longed for a second chance. We can redeem ourselves if we truly want to pay the required price.

Mark learned from his mistakes and recovered himself. May we do as well. "A righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again" (Prov. 24:16).

Would that all of us were fortunate enough to have a relative or a friend like Barnabas who will stand by us, stick up for us, and give us that second chance.

We are impressed with the impartiality of the Bible. It presents its characters without "make-up," as they truly were. This is a mark of its uniqueness and inspiration. Also it is an encouragement to us as we struggle with our human weaknesses.

May our failures never be the cause of alienating other friends. Such a burden would be heavy to bear.

We do not read that Mark ever preached a sermon or worked a miracle. His greatness lay not in his own genius, but in his willingness to help others.

We are reminded that there are frequently points of dispute with good arguments on both sides. Both Paul and Barnabas were valid in their logic.

The lesson of grace and forgiveness is well learned. A fallen brother can return to God (Gal. 6:1, 2).

Questions

1. What do we know of Mark's home and family?
2. Why might we conclude that Peter converted Mark?
3. What role did Mark fill on his first missionary journey?
4. Discuss some possible reasons for Mark's defection at Perga.
5. How do you interpret Paul's refusal to let Mark go with them on the second trip?

6. Why do you think the early Christians called Barnabas the son of exhortation?
7. What do you suppose prompted Paul's change of attitude toward Mark at a later time?
8. Discuss what you have learned about the role of Peter in Mark's account of Jesus' life.
9. In what way are most of us like Mark?
10. What lesson from Mark's case impresses you most?

The Two Builders

As Jesus concluded His great Sermon on the Mount, He laid a challenge at the feet of His hearers. In view of the coming judgment, they must decide how they will respond to His words. Will they be as wise men or as fools? A wise man who builds a house will build upon a sure foundation of solid rock. A fool will build his house upon the sand (Matt. 7:21-27). So a wise man will obey Christ's words while the fool will ignore them. It has been noted that few portions of Scripture have been more lavishly praised and few more widely disobeyed than Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

The Background

To appreciate and understand this message of Christ's, we need to know something of Palestinian geography and climate. It is a rugged land of mountains and valleys. There are distinct wet and dry seasons. The climate provides sudden and violent rain storms. A lovely valley or hollow may appear a perfect place for a house in the dry season. One would have level terrain and rich soil for a garden. The scene would be lovely and peaceful, the site easy to excavate for building. Yet in the rainy season this Eden could become the bed of a raging torrent. Many a fool would be tempted to build his house and lodge his family in such a beautiful but treacherous place.

Jesus' Auditors

The Lord divides all hearers into two classes. All are building a house. Every soul is planning, preparing, laying foundations, and erecting walls. No one is allowed the privilege of being "just a spectator." Fortunately, we are able to choose the foundation on which to build. Among those who build on the sand, we see these responses:

- (a) Those who neither call Him Lord nor obey His will.
- (b) Those who call Him Lord but do not the things He says.
- (c) Those who do not call Him Lord yet try to live by His standards.

- (d) Those who build on the rock who call Him Lord and are careful to obey His every wish.

The Foolish Builder

This man looked only at the surface things. He did not examine and test that on which he erected his house. Evidently he sought the easy way. He wished to avoid toil if at all possible. Sand is always much easier to work with than rock. This builder was shortsighted, not stopping to think what his choice of building sites might be like in six months. We assume that he built a nice house, but everything was on the surface. There was nothing "out of sight," nothing to provide stability, nothing to resist the violent elements. The grander the foolish man's house, the greater the disaster when it fell.

The Wise Builder

This man had a prudent regard for the future. He was not deceived by mere outward appearances. He expended the energy to dig deep in order to find a solid bed rock for his foundation (Luke 6:47, 48).

The Storm

In time, a common storm came upon both houses. The sudden, violent storms of the Palestinian rainy season turned the dry beds and adjacent valleys into raging torrents. On the high ground, situated on its solid rock foundation, stood the wise man's house, safe and enduring. Where once stood the foolish man's mansion not a trace was seen. In the valley below one saw the ruined wreckage, a monument to his folly. Usually when one loses his house to disaster, all his other possessions are lost with it. Sometimes he will even lose his family in the catastrophe.

The Application

All men are building a house. All have a choice of foundations, only one of which will stand. The house He speaks of is our house of faith that is built for eternity. The only foundation that will stand the tests of time is that of faithful obedience to Christ's Word (Gal. 5:6). Jesus saves those that

obey Him (Heb. 5:9). Building on the rock foundation is placing Christ, His will, and His kingdom first in one's life (Matt. 6:33). One may admire Christ and His teaching and yet never get around to obeying Him. For some, *devotion* becomes a substitute for *action*. To have high feelings for Christ and yet do nothing about them is simply to indulge ourselves. It is not enough to thrill at worship. We must be inspired enough *to do something* for God. Some folks give to Christ the same admiration they give a beautiful sculpture or painting which never leaves the gallery to become a vital part of their lives. True religion must get beyond our application for the esthetic to one's sense of duty. There is but one way to prove the sincerity of our faith; that is by our practice (John 14:15).

Luke says the wise man dug deep to secure his foundations. So we must dig through the human customs, traditions, and teachings to the firm foundation of God's truth (Matt. 15:6-8). We must remove the rubble of family loyalties, personal prejudices, preferences, and opinions. It is not enough to be religious, to be a teacher, or a great worker for Christ. We must do the Father's will (Matt. 7:21). It is not just moral evil or heresy that Christ condemns, rather it is shallowness in faith and practice that He warns against.

A day of testing will come to every builder. Be assured that storms, *i.e.*, trials and tribulations will come. While we cannot avoid the storms, we can be sure that our foundation is on solid rock. Houses might stand side by side for years. Both appear equally sound until the testing comes. Then the truth will be known. Without a good foundation, nothing else really matters. In addition to all the stress and shocks of this life, "we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God" (Rom. 14:10).

Some Lessons to Remember

Paul reminds us to take heed *how* we build (I Cor. 3:10). Religion is no place for shortcuts and substitutes. Avoid superficiality in your profession. Dig deep and build on the rock of Truth. Erect a spiritual house that even the most violent storms cannot shake. Paul had such a foundation: "who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or

sword?" Nothing could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:35-38).

Remember that knowledge without obedience is valueless. You could pass an exam in Christian ethics and still not be a Christian! Don't be like Cardinal Lorraine. A contemporary wrote that he was avaricious, malignant, cruel, and deceitful, but "full of religion." We must get beyond the talking stage if we would please God. We must do His will both in the first principles of salvation and in Christian duty.

Build your house of faith in view of the great day of judgment. That is the ultimate test it must pass. Do not be deceived by the lavish praise of men; do not measure your faithfulness by other men. The words that Jesus spoke will judge us in the last day (John 12:48).

Questions

1. This story about the two builders is part of Jesus' great _____.
2. What is the main point of this story?
3. How does the topology of Palestine help us understand this lesson?
4. Discuss the four possible responses to Jesus' claim as Lord.
5. Discuss the various mistakes the foolish man made.
6. In reality what is the house each of these men was building?
7. What are some of the storms of life that test one's spiritual house?
8. What are some of the obstacles we must dig through so we can build on the rock?
9. What is the rock we should build upon?
10. What is the most notable lesson of this story to you?

